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July 25, 1879.

Vol. V.

Single
Number.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS,
No. 98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Price,
5-Cents.

No. 105.

Old Rube, THE HUNTER; OR, The Crow Captive.

A Tale of the Great Plains.

BY CAPTAIN HAMILTON HOLMES.

CHAPTER I. OUTWARD BOUND.

ONCE more on the prairie, with the endless sea-plain stretching far away, beyond the reach of mortal eye. A vast surface, dotted here and there with clumps of trees, with not a sign of human habitation to be seen. A strange, beautiful scene, and I loved it.

I was born of the woods in the East. I had loved them in childhood, when, far up among the New York hills, through the mountain lakes and "John Brown's Tract," I had followed the wolf to his lair, and shot bucks on the sunny slopes; and when it became my fortune to seek pleasure upon the limitless plains of the West, in a life of wild adventure, I learned, I said, to love it.

It was in early summer, when I bade adieu to Leavenworth and struck out upon the plain. I was not insensible to the fact that danger girded me; so I went armed, as he should who traverses the Indian country. My horse was the best I could find at Leavenworth. I bought him from an old voyageur, who had been trapping through the winter, and who was in a hurry to turn all he had into money. It was a noble black, with a little touch of mustang blood. A strong, straight, arrowy form, with great muscular quarters, small head and wide nostrils. For arms I carried the best "Sharp" I could find in St. Louis, together with pistols, and a long hunting-knife. This last was a curious affair, more like a sword than a knife, curved slightly on the edge and very heavy. I had found it of service many a time, up in "John Brown's Tract;" and once, when a buck at bay sprang at me, and bore me down upon my knee, I struck him on the neck. The muscles were tense and hard, and the heavy blade seemed half to divide the neck. After that I liked it, and had one made of finely tempered steel, a little larger than the one I then used. I was out for adventure. The life of the city palled upon me, and I longed for the free breath of the prairie, the loosened rein, and mad gallop—ay, even the combat with the "tigers of the desert."

My companions were two. They, like myself, had taken deep draughts from the overflowing cup of human pleasure, until it sickened them. Willie Mason rode on my right. Tall and straight, a very Saul among his fellows, rich and loved, he was the ideal of manly beauty. But his cousin, Rudolf Strong—Dolf we called him—was a slight, almost effeminate man, with thick, long, brown hair, and eyes that grew humid like a girl's, under any sorrow. I do not know what it was that bound us, great, strong men, to the pale-faced boy of twenty, who looked to us for counsel and protection as to elder brothers. We were unwise to bring him with us, unused as he was to the toils of the chase, and the camp-life on the plains.



TAKING THE KING OF THE HERD.

In one thing he excelled. He was a bold and fearless rider, and had won laurels in the riding-school by his efforts at bar and gate. No fence could stop him when once in the saddle. He seemed to lift his horse by the rein, and his light weight made it play for the animal. Many a time, at home, I have seen him leap his trained horse, Abdallah, over the garden-gate, and ride him quietly upon the veranda, to the no small consternation of his sisters and mother. See him now, as he sits in his saddle, with his body thrown backward, and a shortened rein. You forget that he is so young, in your pride of such noble horsemanship.

Willie was a fair rider, and backed a stout gray, which he had bought at Leavenworth. Dolf would ride nothing but Abdallah, his favorite, and so he had been brought by rail to St. Louis, regardless of our entreaties that he would not take the chances of losing the beautiful creature on the route. But, here he was, strong, full of fire, far out upon the great plain.

Those who know the plain will recognize our situation. Far to the west the land was level. But miles and miles away, dim and blue, reared up against the sky, rose the peaks of the Rocky Mountains, for we had crossed the Platte, going toward the "Black Hills," on the route for the buffalo.

Dolf was in ecstasy. He could be happy forever in the saddle, and the long days we had passed were nothing to him. We had killed small game enough along the route to satisfy hunger, but all were eager for a drive at the monarch of the prairie, the American bison.

We were now in the Black Hill country, and therefore moved cautiously. As each night came we chose some natural fortress on the plain, where boulders or trees covered us from view. One thing we needed, and that one thing was provided, the second week out. We had built a camp-fire, and were broiling some prairie-chicken over the blaze, when we were startled by hearing a voice, all at once, singing one of the melodies peculiar to the negro:

"Deuteronomy's dead and gone,
I hope he's gone to the kingdom,
And when de Lord shall come dar' too—
Hard times dis side of Jordan!

Pull on de clothes line,
Haul on de lead line,
We're all g'wan to Can-I-line
And den goin' home."

"Shet up, Jake," said a gruff voice. "Don't want ter lose yer sculp, do yer?"

Willie stepped out of the covert, and looked for the speakers. There they were within a few feet of the camp, walking their horses leisurely over the grass. The foremost was an unmistakable son of Ham, of the blackest dye. His face was turned toward his companion, who rode at his side. A gaunt, wiry man, in the untanned buckskin common to the hunter and trapper. He was mounted on a long-legged mustang, whose vicious eye and twitching ears told plainly of an unhappy disposition. At the sight of Willie both pulled up with an "Oh, de Lord!" from the negro, and a sudden pitching forward of the trapper's rifle.

"Friend or inimy! speak mighty quick!" cried the mustang's rider.

"Friend," said Willie, "if you will have it so."

"How many of yer?"

"Three."

The man dropped the piece into its original position, and rode forward, accompanied by the black, whose countenance was disfigured by a ghastly grin, which, joined with the terrified look which his face had not yet lost, was ludicrous in the extreme.

The trapper did not speak another word, but, corralling his mustang under the shadow of the trees, he came slowly to the fire, casting wistful looks at the savory food, cooking over the flame. Seeing this, when the meal was ready, I invited them to share in the repast. With a grunt, he stretched forth his hand, and seizing a chicken, raised it to his mouth, smiling slightly; we prepared ours with rather more system, using our knives and birch-bark plates. The negro was not behind his friend in disposing of his food, and very little was left when each, with a sigh of relief, declared himself satisfied.

"Who are yer?" was the first question of the white man. We told him we were out to hunt buffalo and learn the ways of the prairies. He put his hands on his knees, laughing—a drv, bitter, sarcastic

laugh, which did not speak well for his appreciation of our purpose.

"Whar's yer guide?"

"Haven't any."

"What yer goin' ter do when ye pass the Black Hills? Blackfeet hev' yer sculps in about two days."

"We thought we could get along without a guide."

"See yer, stranger, I've bin on these prairies goin' on twenty-five y'ar, man an' boy, an' I reckon I knows a wrinkle or two 'bout it. Yer ain't no business har' in the fust place. Ye'r boys from the towns, 'at has taken a fancy to a big hunt. Wal, as ye hev' done so, tain't fer me ter go ag'inst yer. No, tain't scarcely, but yer don't know whar' yer goin'. The natyves is ravenous beasts. They goes about like roarin' lions, seekin' somebody fer ter sculp. 'Sides, how is yer goin' ter find buffler? Yer can't do it!"

We began to look blank. It had, indeed, been a foolhardy move in us, leaving the forts without a guide. Our new friend saw our dismay, and a smile deepened and spread itself over his homely face. The negro sat on the other side of the fire, and looked at his companion across the blaze. Neither spoke for some moments, but puffed away industriously at the long sandstone pipes which they had lighted after their feast of fowl. There was a mute question in the eyes of both, and then the white man spoke:

"Tain't like me ter go back on a white; no, tain't. Yer can't go up ther' in the Injin country an' not be in danger. No, yer can't. Stands just this way, then: yer want a guide. Wal, I ain't much use ter myself, 'cept in winter, when I kin take pelts; an' so, if ye say it, we 'll go with yer. Tain't no lie fer me to say I've tramped over every foot of land within two hunder' mile of the Black Hills. Know it like a book, I does."

We eagerly accepted his services, and offered to pay him. He grew stiff at once.

"Yer needn't talk *that* way, stranger; I don't want yer money. What is money to a man thet passes his life on the plains? Cities and towns is nothin' to me. Sometimes I goes to the'r forts, an' change pelts fer powder an' ball, an' then I am back ag'in to the free breath of the plains. I tell yer, folks, *I loves it!* I hev' fought Injins on every mile, an' seen many a one drap before my rifle. Drat the'r skins! I *hate* 'em, fer they hev' done many a bad thing ter my friends!"

"How came you here?" I ventured to inquire.

"How came I here? I *live* here, stranger. The broad prairie is my home. Years and years I have tramped across 'em—I an' my old mule, Syntax. Yer hain't looked at thet mule. Well, yer may, an' ef yer unlerstand good sound mule-flesh, thet it is. She hain't but one good quality, an' thet is, she knows me, an' will go when I tell her to. Yes, she will, consarn her. She will scratch, kick, bite, tear, and otherwise disfigure yer mortal frame, ef I tell her to do it. Look at thet eye. Thet mule is nigh onto as old as I am, an' her eye is

as bright as it was twenty y'ar ago, drat me ef it ain't!"

"What do you call her?"

"False Syntax," was the reply. "There was a feller in the fort one time when I was ther', an' he had one of yer blamed books. Wal, I was a-goin' round, and he kep' sayin' to everybody 'at we didn't tork rightly; every one used to tork false syntax. Says I, 'stranger, what mought thet be?' Says he, 'I will gev' yer an example: Ef I war' to say, you *is* a jackass, 'twouldn't be right.' 'No,' says I, 'twouldn't, scarcely.'"

"But, ef I war' to say, you *are* a jackass, that would be right."

"Look hyar, stranger," says I, gettin' riled, 'd'ye mean ter say thet 'er book tell yer thet?'

"Yes," says he, 'False Syntax.'

"Take thet, then," says I, punchin' him in the ear, 'and I'arn better then ter call a gentleman a jackass.' Yer orter hev' seen 'im roll. And the cunnel, he stood by, an' I thought he would bu'st with laughin'. Wal, they kinder tried to smooth it over, an' make out thet he didn't mean to call *me* a jackass; but it wouldn't work, nohow. I cottoned to thet name, though, an' gev' it to Syntax, there."

"Have you been much alone on the plains?" asked Dolf.

"Yes, youngster, a many y'ar, until I foun' that grinnin' critter over thar', who is dyin' fer ye to talk to *him*. Can't cure him of hankerin' arter the towns, I can't. He will keep thinkin' of them, an' talkin' of them, an' runnin' down the prairies, until I feel like punchin' him. But the black rascal knows I am good-natured, an' he goes it on the strength of it."

The darky grinned broadly.

"You say you found him. What do you mean by that?"

"It's a long story," replied the hunter, lifting a fresh brand to his pipe, and puffing away vigorously. "A long story, an' he ain't hardly wuth it. He wouldn't be, alone, only for the gal."

"Eh," said Dolf, sitting up quickly, "what girl?"

"So that has roused you, master Dolf," said Willie, laughing. "How quickly he came to a perpendicular position! But, let's have your story, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Rube!" said the hunter, quickly. "Rube the Hunter, as they call me on the plains."

"Very well, then, Mr. Rube, we—"

"No handles, I tell ye. Plain Rube."

"Rube be it then," said I; "but let us have the story. It will serve to while away the evening."

Rube turned his feet to the fire, and, throwing his body back against a tree, commenced his tale. The trees stood thick about us, throwing great shadows over tranquil faces, as we smoked placidly, while Dolf, no smoker, threw himself at length upon the sward, looking up in the face of the hunter, who looked down on him in a sort of grim complacency, while he commenced his story:

"It were five y'ar back, and a lot of us boys had been out after buffler on the plains. At night we camped near this yer very spot. We were old heads at it, an' we

knowed 'at the Blackfeet an' Crows sometimes med' long marches on the war-path, an' that they reckoned one white scalp wur' worth a dozen natyves. So we didn't go to work buildin' up such a fire as this, 'at I ought to ha' put out afore, but jest enough to cook a little meat 'thout much smoke. Toward seven in the evenin' we see'd a party comin'. 'Twan't a big one, by no means; only three men, 'sides Jake, thar', an' three women. They had wagins, and all the traps that settlers carry, an' I knowed it was some one as had got tired of the great towns, an' the whirl an' bustle of the'r life, an' come out to find a home in the West. We kept still, an' they passed by 'thout seein' us. The men looked strong an' brave, an' I liked them at a look. Both women was ridin'. One wur' a middle-aged one, with a face 'at made me think of the angels one of the Bible men at the fort used to talk about. Her hair was gettin' gray, but she hed thet look I never seen twice in my time. T'other was ridin' with her face away from us, an' I could not see it; but her long ha'r floated clean down to the saddle, in thick, black curls. 'Tain't no ways likely she war' any thing but harnsum. Jake, thar', says 'at she were beautiful, an' I believe him, though he do tell a many twisters, now an' then."

The negro made a deprecating gesture, out, unheeding the dumb show, the hunter went on with his story.

"There were another with them, an' jest as soon as I seen his face, my blood began to b'lie in my veins. I hed seen the face too often not to know it. It were the face of a red devil from the Crow tribe. He used to hang round the forts, and whenever he got a chance to guide a party out upon the plains, they never come back without a fight with the Crows. We knowed him, fer he hed been our guide a year before, an' led us into an ambush, whar' two o' the best boys 'at ever drew a fine bead on a natyve went under. The rest of us cut out an' got away, with jest our hides, an' no more. We swore ter hev' Meton's sculp fer thet, jest as soon as we met him. Two o' the boys raised the'r rifles, but I stopped 'em. God knows I were wrong. But I thought it best to let him go on, an' take him off in the mornin'. They went on, an' camped in the open plain beyond. We camped down, too, an' the boys went to sleep, while I took it on myself ter watch. But we hed traupt fur thet day, an' I wur' nigh about tuckered out, an' so 'tain't no ways wonderful thet I got to dozin'. Not dead asleep, yer see, but in that state half atween sleepin' an' wakin', when a man seems out of the world. It mought a' been twelve o'clock, mayhap, when I were waked by a great yell. I thort the natyves were at us, an' I sung out ter the boys ter git up, an' go in. They jumped up in a hurry, s'pectin' to see the woods lined with the painted reptiles, but, on lookin' out, we c'd see thet all the noise kem' from the plain. I knew what it were then. They were at the other camp."

"We tuk our rifles an' stole down toward em. Yes, they had pitched inter the camp, about a dozen of them, an' it were over afore we got near. Jest as I expected, the liar of a Crow hed brought his friends down

upon them. We c'd see them trottin' round in the camp, robbin' ther wagins and scalpin' the dead. Thet riled us, an' seven rifles kem' up, an' as many red-skins kem' down. The other five mounted, an' put out upon the plain. It were pesky dark, an' no manner of use fer us to try to chase them, so we turned our attention to the camp."

"Youngsters, I am an old trapper, a tough old nut, but I tell ye, an' I ain't 'shamed on it, thet when I looked at that sight, I cried right out, like a great overgrown baby. Maybe ye'll laugh at me fer it, but it's true. Thar' they lay, nearly the hull on 'em, scalped and bloody. Thar' lay thet woman, the oldest one, whose face I liked so well, an' blame me ef she wa'n't a-smilin' jest as if they killed her sleepin'. Youngsters, I jest laid down by thet poor critter, an' layin' my hand on the cold dead forehead, I swore to hunt her murderer, thet Crow guide, until I hed his sculp. Jake, here, were lying partly under a wagin, an' we pulled him out ter look at him. He warn't dead. The tomahawk warn't sharp enough to split his skull, no ways. Jake take off yer cap."

The negro obeyed, and showed the bare, white skull. The scalp had been torn from his head, yet he still lived.

"Scalped, by Jupiter," shouted Willie.

"Yes, sculped. We brought him to, an' found out all about them. They were immigrants, goin' somewhar' up country to live. Soon's he begun ter look round, he asked fer Miss Ida. Thet was what he called her. Soon's he spoke, it kem' into my mind thet they hed carried her off. An' I tell ye, knowin' as I did the'r ways, I would sooner a' seen her lying dead at my feet, than ter know she were in the hands of them brutes."

"Have you kept your oath?"

"Not yit; no. I hain't done as I said I would as yit. This blamed villain, he is a chief, now, keeps hisself outer my way. He knows jist what I've promised to do, and he knows me. Thet's the reason why he ain't dead. He is on his guard all the time."

"How old was this girl when she was taken?" I asked of Jake.

"Fifteen, masser."

"Then she must be twenty now."

"Yes, thet she is. I know she is alive, an' what is more, she is a great medicine among the Crows. They hev' med' a prophethess of her, an' it hes saved her from them so fur. Although I do hear that Meton hes sed thet she shall be his squaw. An' he is workin' every way ter get her. But she hes the men all on her side, and he don't dare to tech her yit."

Next morning we rose with the light. Rube had been our watcher, and it was he that roused us. An hour was spent in getting our breakfast and preparing for the march, and then we were off again.

I saw that Dolf was pensive. This was not strange. To a sensitive mind like his, the thought that a beautiful girl of his own race was a slave in the hands of an Indian tribe, was sad. He rode at my bridle-rein, moodily dreaming, when all at once he broke out:

"Couldn't we save her, Charlie?"

"What are you thinking of, Dolf?"

"That girl. It seems too bad that she should be left in the hands of that red fiend."

"Umph! Well, what do you mean to do? Shall we six ride into the Crow nation, and warn them to give up that girl into our hands or it will be worse for them? I would like to help her; but really, my boy, as I look at it, it is no use talking about it."

"I can't help thinking of it; I then, did not sleep last night. I was thinking all the time of her and of that dear old lady who was killed. I felt like hugging that old fellow when he told me about his crying over her dead body."

"So did I. He is a brave old Roman, and we were lucky to get him for a guide. There, he is beckoning to us. Ride on."

Rube was some distance in front, and had paused suddenly, and beckoned us on with his hand. We rode quickly up, and saw the eyes of the hunter fixed upon a great cloud of dust rising slowly from the prairie, far to the south-east.

"Well?" said I, inquiringly. "What is it?"

"Buffler!" was the laconic response. "Git ready yer rifles."

CHAPTER II

The Buffalo Hunt

We had come out upon the plains for sport, and here, before we had dared to hope it, our wishes were gratified. You who have been hunters in your day, whether of large game or small, can imagine the thrill of delight that passed through every frame at the words spoken by our guide—Buffalo! We could see the cloud of dust rolling up, and knew that they were miles away as yet, so rifles were taken from their cases, and caps fitted to every tube. I use a Sharp's rifle in the hunt. Nothing can stand before a bullet hurled out by this merciless arm. The hunter carried one as well, and I considered it no stain upon my taste in arms that he thought it the best.

Willie used a Manton. He had a little of the English blood in him, and held in reverence every thing English in regard to arms. We had many a controversy in relation to the weapons, and were eager to try their respective merits upon the monarchs of the prairie.

The wind was blowing strong toward the drove. We were too good at deer-stalking not to know that this would never do; so we rode hard to get on the flanks of the coming herd. Willie and I went together while Dolf, Jake and Rube took the left. The signal to close in was to be a single rifle-shot, from the trapper.

We rode with a free rein, and were so close in a little thicket, near which the herd must pass, unless turned from their course in some unforeseen way. Here we halted and prepared for the charge. We could see them now plainly, a thousand huge backs, rising and falling in their unwieldy stride as

they came on. Their fierce little eyes gleamed out from the mass of shaggy hair about the huge heads, and my blood warmed for the struggle.

On they came; and now we could hear their hoofs pounding upon the prairie turf. We waited in breathless suspense;—and then, all at once, came the crack of the rifle, and a hoarse shout from the other side. I touched my horse with my heel, and he bounded out into the plain. Hurrah! The herd have taken the alarm, and the front ones commence crowding back, while the others, stupidly pressing on, hurl their unfortunate leaders forward, sorely against their will.

We were now at the work, and, green-horns that we were, each selected the toughest looking buffalo bull he could reach, and let drive. Mine took it, hard and sharp behind the shoulder, and went staggering to his knees, while the one at whom Willie aimed, as luck would have it, went down to rise no more.

"What do you think of a Manton now, Charlie, my lad?" laughed Willie. "See that fellow, don't you?"

"All right, old fellow, you are in luck this time, but I am going to have that fellow I hit," I replied.

"Go at him, then; I am after another—a cow this time, for they say the hump is the best eating."

My buffalo had risen to his feet and stood with the blood dripping from his shaggy coat. I rode near, and was just about to deliver my fire, when the angry beast made a fierce charge, uttering a bellow of rage and pain. I let him have a second shot as he came on, and brought him to his knees. The ball struck him fairly in the center of the forehead, and saved me from the mad fury of his charge, although it did him no visible harm. But the charge accomplished one thing more. It separated the bull from his companions, and I rode in between. The hunt had turned away toward the north, and I knew by the frequent cracking of rifles that my comrades were at work. Willie had bagged one already, and from pure shame, I could not leave this hard nut I had undertaken to crack, while I had a shot in my pouch. So I shook loose my reins and plunged forward again; my horse, by this time, as hot and restless as myself.

His majesty had enough of it, evidently, for he started off at the heavy, lumbering pace so peculiar to the animal, across the prairie, in the opposite direction to that taken by my friends. His blood dropped at every step from his wounded shoulder; I hoped to see him fall at every stride. I loaded my rifle as I rode, and gave it to him once more. This time he paused and turned his head toward me, with a look in his eyes I shall never forget. It said, plainly: "You have hunted me to the death; your last bullet has found my life; come not near me yet, or beware." There was a something truly majestic in the noble animal, as he stood there calmly waiting for his death. I sat in my saddle, and waited for the end. Once or twice his eye turned toward the distant west, and at last he charged me. I rode away, looking back at

him. He paused in mid career, a quiver ran through every fiber of his huge frame, and the giant lay powerless upon the short prairie grass. I had slain my first buffalo.

I sprang to the earth. No need to fasten my horse, for, trained to the life of the prairies by his former owner, he would never wander away from his master. I was in a transport of delight. I had slain him fairly, and it was the greater joy that he had struggled for his life.

I arose and looked at the sky; and then, for the first time, I realized that I had ridden out of sight of my friends. I took out my watch. I remembered that just before we charged, Willie said it was eight o'clock; now it was half-past nine. I had been riding an hour or more, at the best speed of my horse. They had been going the other way nearly as long. I was lost on the prairie!

Were you ever on the sea in a calm, kind reader, far out of sight of shore? Did you then ever sit upon the deck, while a feeling of utter desolation, of loneliness, stole over you, in spite of all you could do to shake it off? Have you heard the steady moan of the surge upon some desolate shore, when no soul but yourself was near? If you have, you can then have some idea of the feelings of a man in my situation.

I looked all about me. Far as the eye could see, an unbroken prairie rolled out before me, dotted here and there with clumps of trees. I listened intently, hoping to hear the rifles of my friends. I listened in vain. My horse, as if knowing my situation, and that I needed sympathy, came to me, and laid his head upon my shoulder. I put my arm over the old fellow's neck, and caressed him. I did not feel so much alone. "Old fellow," said I, "we will have to do the best we can for ourselves. Let us see if we can find our friends."

I could not bear to leave any sign of my victory, so dearly bought, behind me. I cut off the tufted end of the buffalo's tail, and put it in my saddlebag. This done, I left the carcass to the coyotes, and rode back upon the trail. I made up my mind to one thing: that my friends must have missed me before this, and would ride back to the place where we charged, and either wait for me or ride back upon the trail. It was a broad one enough, for the clotted gore lay thick upon every leaf, to the spot where the brave beast fell. I rode rapidly, with my eyes upon the ground. I do not know what induced me to raise my eyes, but when I did, I saw something that thrilled me. Scarcely a mile away, spear-heads glittered in the sun-rays, and a body of Indians were coming down upon me at full speed. I was cut off from my friends.

There was nothing for it but a ride for life. There they were, twenty in number, hideously begrimed as only Indians can be, coming straight toward me, as fast as their horses could go. I turned my horse's head the other way, and was off like the wind. Never till then did I know what a marvel, in the shape of horse-flesh, I bestrode. He seemed to fly. The pace of the swift Indian horses lessened to a walk, as it seemed to me; and yet they were going at their highest speed. I shook my hand at them in derision and defiance. I knew them for Black-

feet, those Arabs of the prairies, and thought I would teach them a lesson. So I sat steadily in my saddle, until the foremost was within a few hundred yards. Then I turned upon him, and gave him the contents of my rifle. It was a long pull, and a good shot. The fellow went rolling to the earth, and his mustang pranced riderless over the prairie. Then I rode away again, and, though they clung persistently to the pursuit, by noon I had ridden them out of sight. Then I reined in, and took a look at the situation. If I was lost before, I was in a worse condition now, for I had lost the trail utterly. I cursed the Blackfeet for their ill-timed interference. What should I do? I could not return to my friends; I did not know the way back to the forts; in short, I was in a bad situation.

I turned my horse's head in the direction of the spot where I had struck the buffalo first. Perhaps they were there still; perhaps I could find it. I rode all that afternoon, and at night camped in a thicket.

I slept, and was awakened at early dawn by the sound of voices near at hand, speaking in the Indian tongue. I crawled stealthily to the edge of the thicket, and looked out. A party of Crows, five in number, stood by the side of their horses, looking out upon the prairie. They were bold-looking fellows, with heavy, muscular limbs. Soon another person rode out of the lower thicket, and joined them. My heart gave a single throb, and then bowed down before the glorious vision which presented itself to my eyes. A woman, in the flower of youth and beauty, with great curls sweeping down upon her horse's back, and the face of an angel! I never doubted for a moment who she was. This was the Ida who had been taken by the Crows five years before, and who was now their propheticess. Ida, for whose rescue Rube had sworn to peril life itself. Such a woman! More than even Dolf's exuberant fancy could have painted her, my ideal of womanly grace and beauty. She was clad in a beautifully wrought kirtle of buckskin, smooth and soft, embroidered here and there with colored beads. A sort of crown of eagle-feathers covered her dark hair, and a beautiful little rifle hung at her saddle-bow. She spoke to the Indians, and they bowed their heads before her, and her voice was like running water, clear and sweet. She spoke in the Indian tongue, and I could not understand her; but she pointed out upon the prairie, and I, looking, saw of what she spoke. On the extreme verge of the horizon glittered a clump of spears, and I knew that my friends of the day before were near at hand. What could I do better than throw myself on her mercy? These men obeyed her implicitly, and why would they not spare me at her command? and that such would be her command I had not a doubt. Without a moment's thought, I stepped from my covert, leading my horse by the bridle. The sudden cry of the men warned her of my presence, and she turned sharply upon me.

"Who are you?" she cried, in English. "What do you want here?"

"My name is Charles Westgate," I replied. "I am out upon the plains for a hunt. In yesterday's hunt I followed a

buffalo too far, and in endeavoring to find my way back, I fell in with yonder vagabonds, who chased me out of my way. I slept in this clump last night, and that explains my presence."

"Then you know who yonder men are?"

"They are Blackfeet."

"They are not Blackfeet, in spite of their paint. They are Crows."

"Then you do not fear them?"

"You are wrong. Sooner would I fall into the hands of the Blackfeet than into theirs."

"You are the prophetess of the Crows, are you not?"

"I was; but I have escaped from them, through fear of their chief, Meton. He is doubtless leader of yonder gang, who are men chosen for their wickedness to be his boon companions, even as these faithful men are his enemies."

"Then you have escaped?"

"Yes. How did you know I was the Crow prophetess?" she asked.

"From an old hunter who knew of your capture, five years ago, and has been trying, ever since, to free you."

"Ah!"

"Why have you not escaped before?"

"First, because I was watched; second, why should I escape? Every friend I had in the world was gone, and it was only until Meton began to persecute me that I thought of it. Yesterday we came out for a hunt, and I escaped from their hands by the aid of these friends. They are searching for us now."

"What will you do?"

"I have not decided. Let me talk to my friends."

She turned away, and entered into conversation with the Crows. She had not much time to spend in that way, for the lances were coming up fast. After a little she came to my side.

"Do you go with us, sir?"

"What have you decided upon?"

"To ride away at full speed, keeping this clump of trees between us and our enemies. We hope to escape unperceived."

"I am with you," was my reply.

We touched our horses, and they bounded away across the prairie. Just then one of those unforeseen circumstances, which happen to break every well-arranged plan, disconcerted ours; for, coming up from below, we saw a body of Indians equal to those who were following, riding toward us.

"More enemies," cried Ida; "heavens, we are lost."

"Back to the thicket!" I shouted; "it is our only chance of safety."

We turned and rode back from whence we came. We piled up a breastwork upon the worst defended side, and prepared for the onset.

The two parties joined about half a mile from our camp, with whoops of joy. It appeared that they had been separated in chasing me, and had thus met, much to our discomfiture. After a conference of some moments, the chief separated himself from the rest, and came toward us.

"That fellow can speak English, I believe," said I, addressing Ida.

"Yes; quite well."

"Then I will go out and talk to him."

He had left his rifle in the hands of his friends, retaining only his tomahawk in his belt. I stepped out in the open space, apparently unarmed, but with my heart beating against as pretty a specimen of "Colt" as was ever seen. I seldom showed it, and I knew that the natives were not aware of its use, as they were then just out. I rode close up to him, and addressed him in the concise dialect affected by the Indian.

"What does my brother want?"

The Indian spread out his hands, to show that he was unarmed, and then said, in a tone of gentle amity:

"Let my white brother listen. Last sun we came out upon the plains to hunt the buffalo. With us came the white prophetess, loved by all the tribe of the Crows. While we hunted the buffalo, she was lost. Has my brother seen her?"

"Perhaps she has returned to the wigwams of the Crows."

"My brother is wrong. She has not returned to the wigwams of the Crows. Has my brother seen her?"

"What if she wishes to leave the wigwams of the Crows, and go back to her own people?"

"It may not be," replied Meton, savagely.

"She must not go back to the wigwams of her people. She belongs to the Crows."

"Would my brother force her to go back?"

"Let my brother listen. If he had a fine horse, and it went out among the wolves, would he not follow it, and force it to return to the corral?"

"She shall not go back unless she wishes it."

"My brother says it; but how will he make his words good? Let him look out upon the plain. He will see there many brave warriors, the bravest of the Crow tribe. If my brother will give up the prophetess, let him do so, and then go in peace. If he will not do this, my young men will come, and take his scalp, and take her away."

"Let the young men come," was my reply, for I was getting heated, "and they will find that we are not armed with bulrushes."

I looked out at the Crows. Most of them were armed with lances, while some half a dozen carried rifles. From the fellows with the lances I had little to fear, except in point of numbers. There were forty of them besides the chief, greasy-looking vagabonds, rendered still more hideous by the ghastly paints they daubed over all parts of their bodies. It looked like a hard pull, but my blood was up, and so I defied him.

He went back to his men, and I to mine. Ida had unstrapped the little rifle from her saddle, and was quietly looking at the cap.

"You are not going to help?" I cried.

"Why not?" she answered. "It is for my sake that all this is done, and why should I not strike for myself?"

The rascals were now in motion, wheeling in great circles about the clump. I took my rifle in my hand, and stepped out. A brawny savage—not one of those who chased me, by the way—threw up his hands in derision. I drew a fine bead upon him,

and gave it to him. He went down as if a bolt from heaven had struck him, and I returned to the clump, while the savages rode quickly out of range.

I loaded and stepped out again. The half-dozen with rifles came up, and let drive at me all together, the balls cutting the leaves from the trees, but effecting no damage in life or limb. I took aim at another who was making himself particularly conspicuous, and laid him out by the side of his friend. That sickened them, and they rode once more out of range, and grouped together about a mile from us. They had not succeeded admirably, thus far. Two of their number had fallen, and they were as far from their object as before. The result of their consultation was a muster of courage, and a determination to make a charge.

I spoke to my Crow friends. They rose and looked at their rifles, for all of them were well armed. In short, they were the regular body-guard of Ida, and were ready to die in her defense. I looked at them once, and their looks said *fight*. Indeed, there was little else for them. If they were taken a horrible death, as renegades and traitors, could only be theirs. We were ready for the charge.

It came! With yells which none but an infuriated Indian can give, and which is calculated to appall the stoutest heart, they came on. We waited until every bullet could tell, and then opened upon them. Half a dozen were down before they were half way across, and they forced their way fully up to our breastwork, upon which they had made no calculation, with the loss of ten in all. All our rifles were loaded for the last struggle, and I gave the contents to a black-looking villain who was climbing over the breastwork, and then drew my revolver. I fired one barrel, and a man dropped. With a yell of joy, three of them flung themselves upon me. To their surprise, the pistol which they thought empty went off again and again, stretching an Indian on the sod at every discharge. With a yell of dismay, they dashed out of the thicket, and mounting their horses, rode out of reach, followed by the derisive yells of my friends, not one of whom, strange to say, had been wounded. I myself had been touched by a bullet upon the arm. Ida took my handkerchief, and bound it up. Her soft touch thrilled me. Her fingers trembled as they touched my arm. Her eyes said, "I thank you." I turned my head away, that I might no longer be dazzled by the glorious vision.

"You have saved me," she said, softly.

"I have saved myself as well," I replied. "You have nothing to thank me for."

"But, I must thank you; they may return, and we may yet be conquered. But, if we escape, I shall never cease to be grateful. Are you in much pain?"

"A scratch; it is over already."

"I am glad. What are they doing?"

"Nothing much—only preparing to roast us. Get your men to work, and pull up the grass around this clump. The villains are going to fire the prairie."

She spoke to the Crows, and we went to work with a will. In ten minutes a space three feet wide was bare all along the front

of our position. Meton came toward us for a parley.

"My young men are very angry," he said, "and are going to set fire to the grass. I do not wish to see the prophetic burn with fire. Let her come back to us, and all will be well."

"My friend," said I, walking out with a pistol in my hand, "do you see this little article?"

"See him. Short gun. Very much fire many times. Never stop fire."

"Very well. I give you fair warning that when you get to yonder tuft of grass, I am going to fire at you."

The fellow wheeled his horse about, and rode off at full speed. As he neared the clump, he suddenly disappeared from my sight, while the side of the horse was presented to my view as he rode, clinging by one foot and his hand to the saddle. I could not but admire the exquisite horsemanship displayed in the action, even while hungering and thirsting for a shot at him. I stood looking at him in blank astonishment, when a red face appeared under the neck of the horse, and a shaft came whizzing past my ear. I got myself behind a tree in all haste, when he straightened up in the saddle, and was off like the wind.

Soon a smoke rose slowly, and we knew that he was at work. Then a bright flame flashed upward, and a long line of fire marched steadily down upon us. The heavens seemed in a glow. The heat grew more intense as the fire approached. Soon respiration was difficult, and the air was filled with cinders, and a sultry veil hung thick about us. I looked at Ida. Her form had straightened up proudly, and she stood like a statue carved in ivory, looking across the flames at the demons on the other side. The flames reached our barricade, and blazed fiercely for a few moments, while we almost sunk beneath the fiery glare. But it swept on to the right hand and the left, leaving before us a black and barren waste, while far to the other side the Indians peered out at us, and tried to make out our forms, lying upon the blackened sward. They had seen the flames part on either side, and they regarded it as the work of the Great Spirit.

The flame had passed by, and Ida looked parched and thirsty. I produced my brandy-flask, and its taste revived her. We turned to watch the progress of the flames. Perhaps there is no grander scene in nature, and yet it is terrible, than a prairie on fire. The great wall of flame went rushing on, shooting up great tongues of fire far toward the zenith, and roaring like an army marching to the battle. The terrible heat had not passed away, and our animals hung their heads and looked pitifully in need of water. I began to realize our situation. If the Crows chose to besiege us, there was little hope that we should escape; unless, indeed, we chose to die of thirst rather than fall into their hands. Food we should not lack while our horses remained: but water?

Night was upon us before we were aware. We kindled a large fire, which threw its glare far out upon the prairie. I feared the night attack more than that of the day. I feared that we should be over-

I think it was nearly twelve o'clock when the shock came. My men were all on their guard; none could say we had not watched; when, like a flash, the whole troop were upon us. Ida slept at the foot of a tree. I myself had begun to think that they had given up the design of attacking us, and had seated myself for a moment, when a rush of many bodies through the underbrush told us that the hour of trial had come. I stood over Ida, with my revolver ready. My companions, borne down in the first rush, never spoke again, except one, whom they kept for vengeance sake.

I saw that they feared my revolver, and I menaced them as they approached.

"Why fight longer?" said one. "Bes' you give up now. S'pose you give up, no be killed."

"Keep off!" I replied.

They held me in parley some minutes, and then, from the trees about me, half a dozen lithe forms fell upon my head. My arms were pinioned, my legs bound, and I was a prisoner in the hands of my merciless enemy, Meton." Here the journal ends.

CHAPTER III.

The Hunters.

THE friends had pressed hard upon the skirts of the flying herd, and several huge bodies, cumbering the sod, attested their prowess. Weary at last, they returned. Charlie was not in sight, and Willie remembered that he had been engaged in combat with the buffalo when he left him. He looked anxiously around. No gory man and horse could be seen; but southward, red blood-stains, with hoof-marks, side by side, showed where he had pursued the buffalo.

"It's all right," said he. "Charlie was bound to have that buffalo and has followed him. Let us camp and wait for his return."

The old hunter shook his head, and went about building a fire, muttering low to himself. He did not like the looks of the thing. He knew that Indians swarmed upon the plains, especially in the buffalo season, and he was afraid for Charlie.

"The boy was too quick," he muttered. "Why didn't he stick to the herd? Buffer enough 'thout running an old bull out upon ther prairie."

He went to work, nevertheless, in an artistic manner, flaying the buffalo which promised best, and cutting off a huge portion of the savory hump. He was an epicure in his way, and worked with a will, and then gave it into the hands of the negro. That worthy looked at it with unutterable fondness, and proceeded to improvise a spit from a limb of a tree; and in a few moments the mass was hissing and sputtering over a fire. They waited with what appetites they might, for they were sharp-set after their ride; and when it was fully cooked they fell to with a will. The piece had lessened sensibly in size when they had finished their work, and a look of relief was visible in every face.

"That's prime," said Rube. "Now, then, whar's that boy?"

"Charlie?"

"Yes."

"What do you think?"

"Lost, I reckon. Chased that bummer to fer. S'pos'n' we mount an' ride down o' his trail?"

They were all ready, and soon were pressing down the course followed by Charlie the old man of the plains leading, and keeping his eyes upon the bloody trail. An hour and a half passed, and they reached the spot where the buffalo fell. Here the hunter dismounted and looked more carefully at the ground. A short search showed him the fact that Charlie had returned, and they must follow the back-trail. They reached the point where he caught sight of the Indians and had wheeled his horse in flight. Here the hoofs had pressed hard into the sod, pointing to the east. The hunter rode rapidly out upon the new trail.

All at once he leaned eagerly forward in his saddle and peered at the earth. Then he rolled down, the wonderful beast he rode standing stock-still, and watching her master's movements with a curious eye. He looked up, after a brief examination, saying:

"Injins!"

"What?" cried Dolf. "How do you know? I can see that something has passed, but, in all probability, it is a herd of buffalo."

"How long yer been on the plains youngster?" replied the old man, in sovereign contempt. "S'pose yer kin tell me any thing 'bout ther plains? Yer can't, scarcely."

"I beg your pardon," replied Dolf; "my anxiety for Charlie led me into it. I don't propose to put my knowledge against yours. I merely asked for information."

"Oh, wal, that's all right, then," replied he, mollified at once. "I'll tell yer; an' fust let me say that I never tuk an Injin fer a buffer in my life—no, not once, as I remember. Wal, how do I know these yer marks was made by an Injin hoss and not by buffer? First, an' best: buffer don't hev' round hoofs, ner they don't trot; next, buffer don't smoke pipes!"

As he spoke, he lifted from the earth a pipe-bowl, carved in red sandstone, evidently dropped by the pursuers in their chase.

"The boy hes the best of it from the start," went on the hunter. "Ther ain't a better hoss on the plains then thet one he rides; an' these fellers begin ter see it. Ther ain't nothin' ter do but follow, an' see how ther thing turns out."

They rode all that afternoon, some hours behind the object of their search. The Indians had left a broad trail, for they thought of no such thing as pursuit. The grass was beaten down as if an avalanche had passed over it. On their way they passed by the body of the Indian shot by Charlie. They had left him where he fell, in their reckless haste, and he was lying in his blood upon the short prairie-grass—a stalwart savage, but with a bold, bad face. They sat in their saddles, looking down on him. The bullet had passed through his breast, passing out at the back. He had not died at once, as was evident from the manner in which he lay. He had plucked up some of the prairie-grass and formed a pillow for his dying head, and then, drawing his blanket

about him, had died bravely, in his simple way, giving his soul into the hands of the Great Spirit.

The hunter moralized.

"Now, ther' yer see what skulkin', an' trampin', an' hoss-stealin' kin bring a man to. I know thet natyve, an', next ter Meton, I hated him wust. He were just off a piece with Meton, consarn him, an' they always hunt together. Meton 'ud go out and pretend ter guide parties, and this skunk 'ud bring down the Crows upon them. Now he lies ther'; an' I make no doubt thet yer thinkin' about ther poor Injin, an' how we whites hev wronged them. 'Tain't right. Ther a greasy, theevin', hoss-stealin' race, an' I hold it a greater sin to let one of them pass then ter rub him out. Ride on!"

We left him where he lay, looking noble in death, as a warrior should. The hunter mused and at last broke out:

"Yer saw the paint on that Injin. Thet puzzles me. Thet is Blackfoot paint, an' he is a Crow. What deviltry him and Meton hed bin gettin' up, I don't know, but they were disguised. I can't think."

"Do you think they have caught Charlie?" asked Dolf.

"No. Ner they won't, ef he don't want ter be caught. He waited fer them ter get in range, an' then rubbed out thet natyve. He's got a hoss, I can tell you, almost ekal to Syntax."

Dolf cast a queer look at the mustang upon which he was riding, and the remembrance of the beautiful horse Charlie rode, and the idea of contrasting the two was too much for his risibles, and he burst into a hearty laugh. Rube looked nettled.

"Yer may laugh, youngster, but, look har, will ye. The trail is straight ter yonder clump of bushes. 'Twon't be outer the way ef we try this out. Let's race!"

Dolf looked down at his horse, Abdallah, and laughed louder than ever. I saw a sly twinkle in the old hunter's eye, as he offered to give Dolf a start of half a dozen rods. Dolf in return offered him half the way. After considerable chaffing on either side, Willie gave the word, and they started off together.

The mustang, at first sight, was a hard-headed, obstinate-looking beast, with the vicious eye peculiar to the race. For a few rods, without any perceptible effort, she kept up to the horse, going along much in the manner of a skater. Half-way across, Rube said something to her, which she understood, and then followed one of the most remarkable races upon record. The legs of the mule seemed to lengthen, and her body to shorten perceptibly, while their motion was so rapid that they could scarcely be seen. It is enough to say that Rube pulled up at the clump, half a dozen lengths ahead of the Arabian. Dolf leaned over and shook hands with the hunter:

"Fairly beaten," said he. "I will give you five hundred doilars for that mustang."

"Money couldn't buy her, lad; an' I'm glad if I have learned you a wrinkle. Never again despise a thing fer its looks. Yer can't buy Syntax. We've tramped these yer prairies too many years together. Git up, Syntax."

And the forsaken-looking brute went on, looking more stubborn than ever.

They reached the spot where the Indians had discontinued the pursuit, and could see the track of the fleet steed leading out alone upon the prairie. The hunter pointed with his hand:

"See thar," he said, "the heathen hev' given it over in despair. I thort they couldn't catch him. You kin see how they huddled up together, and swore in Injin, while the youngster rode on, laughing at them for their pains. Consarn their painted hides. Do the reptyles think ter ketch a white human thet way? See, they've tired of it, an' gone off, this yer way. Let's go on after the boy."

Shortly after, the trail turned back toward the place of the buffalo-hunt in the morning. They rode hard, and, unluckily enough, camped for the night, instead of pressing on in pursuit. Had they done so, those few brave friends of Ida would not be lying in their gore among the trees, stark and stiff. They came to the place of combat at early dawn, and they saw them lying there ghastly and scalped. Among the many hoof-prints in the cinders, they could see those of the black horse Charlie rode, and which they had followed so far that they knew every nail in it. Wandering about among the trees, Dolf found a little paper fluttering over the ground. He lifted it, and read:

"I, Charles Westgate, was taken prisoner by the Crows, in company of the white girl known as the 'Crow Prophetess.' If this is ever found, send it to William Westgate, New York City."

"You see this," cried Dolf, striking the paper with his hand. "They have taken him, and I swear never to go back, until I have rescued him, or know that he is dead."

Rube reached over and shook hands.

"I am with yer."

"And I," said Willie.

"You don't say any thing, Jake."

"Wot's de use for I to talk! Don't s'pose I s'e gwine ter stay har, an' hab my head tek off, next time, does yer? No, sah, so I's gwine wid yer."

"I don't quite understand this note," said Willie. "Would you think that the prophetess was a prisoner as well as Charlie?"

"I think so," replied Rube. "She's got tired ov ther blamed mean ways and guv' them the go-by. Yer friend hes fallen in with her, an' been taken in her company. Ha!"

"What is it?"

Rube was down upon his knees, peering intently at the mark of a hoof upon the sod. He rose with a sigh, saying, quietly, "Meton!"

"How do you know that?"

"I hev' trailed that mustang too many times not to know him. He wusn't in the gang who chased your friend, but j'ined them arterwards. You needn't be afraid o' my gettin' tired now. I'd foller him, till I dropped down an' died."

"Will they go back at once to the Crow country?"

"Can't tell yit. They mought, and then ag'in they mought not. They hain't got much the start ov us, thet's very plain. This yer' work were done last night, an' they are jist off this morning. These fellers here were some ov her friends, p'raps, an' they

died like men, fightin' fer her. Jake, does ye understand? Your mistress, Ida, was here last night, and was taken again by the Crows."

The negro stared at him stupidly. He had looked upon his mistress as utterly lost since that fearful night, five years ago, when she was taken by the Crows.

"Miss Ida?"

"Yes; look hyar. Does you see thet footprint. No Injin foot ever made it. It's a moccasin, sure enough, but it is a white woman's step."

Jake fell on his face and kissed the footprint. Then he lifted his honest face, streaming with tears, saying:

"I's goin' wid yer now, shuah! Don't you be 'fraid fer me. If it's to save Miss Ida, den dem Injins may hab dis head if dey want it." They mounted and followed the trail.

CHAPTER IV.

On the March, and a Happy Meeting

We left Charles Westgate and Ida in the hands of Meton. The chief came to Charles, as he lay bound, and glared down upon him with a tiger-like joy. He gloated over him with all a savage's delight over a fallen foe. He had work enough to do to keep the hands of his men away from him. They remembered the many dead, lying out upon the blackened prairie. The four bodies in their hands were not enough to appease them. They wanted fresh victims. Besides, these had died bravely, fighting to the last; it gave them no pleasure to see men die so. They wished to see the strong body writhing in agony, and the bold lips quiver with anguish.

They made ready to march on the next morning, leaving the bodies, scalped and unburied, on the plain. They bound the feet of Charles under the horse, by means of a lariat; his hands were also bound, and an Indian rode on either side.

Ida was not bound. These rough men respected their prophetess, and dared not profane her person by bonds. They would have expected that the Great Spirit would strike them dead for the sacrilegious act, had they laid a hand upon her. She rode her favorite horse, sitting in the saddle like Zenobia, going out to battle. Her arms had not been taken from her, and, although a strict surveillance was kept over her movements, she was, in other ways, free to act as she pleased.

"Do your bonds pain you?" she asked, riding close up to him.

"Not much," was the reply. She looked at his ankles and saw that the tense cord was cutting into the flesh. She said something to the guards in a sharp tone, and with abashed looks, one of them loosened the lariat. The prisoner repaid her by a look of gratitude, for he had been in agony all the ride, and her kindness touched him. She looked at him, from time to time, with a yearning look, as one who all through life had been yearning for kindness and sympathy, and, when she had made a friend, lost him at the beginning. For his part, he was sad, for every step of the fleet steed was taking him further and further from

home and friends. It is not at all wonderful that they turned for sympathy to each other.

At night, they camped on the South Fork, near the Black Hills. They had no intention as yet, of leaving the plains. They had come out to hunt buffalo for the winter supply, and would not go back until they had enough.

Still they gave Charles no loophole from which to escape. At night, they cut a lariat into many lengths, and tied one to his hands and one to his feet; then others were laid across his body, and Indians lay down upon the loose ends. In this way he passed the night; and, if he stirred, the motion awoke the Indians, who warned him to be still, and again lay down to rest.

It was a strange scene. The fire in the midst of the prairie, shining out upon the bright river, the sturdy warriors sitting or lying around, with their blankets drawn about them; the horses corralled near at hand, with the silent guards near them.

It might have been two o'clock, when Charles awoke with a start. There was a terrible uproar in the camp. Rifles flashed, spears gleamed, and the crash of a fight sounded in his ears. The horses stamped and neighed, tugging at their lariats vainly. War-whoops, followed by answering cries, told that it was an Indian attack. The Blackfeet, those omnipresent rovers, had happened on the camp, and could not resist their innate longing for stolen horseflesh. The combat was soon over, for the attacking party was small, and had no idea of the number and bravery of the assailed. Indeed, a Blackfoot warrior rarely stops to count, where horseflesh is concerned. They were driven off, leaving one of their number stiffening in death, at the fireside.

Ida had been sleeping when the shock came, and intuitively knew the cause. Rising, she went to the place where Charles lay, and found that his guards had left him. She cut the cords that bound him, and he rose. At first he was so stiff with his recent bonds that he could hardly use his limbs, but staggered like a drunken man. This was soon over, and she led the way to the spot where the horses were picketed. An Indian guard rushed toward them, but a single blow from Charles laid him gasping. To cut the ropes, and mount, was the work of a moment, and then they were off upon the prairie, riding for life, with the sound of the combat still ringing in their ears.

For two miles they rode in silence, and then he leaned over toward her in the pale moon-rays, holding out his hand. She took it. That was their betrothal. There were no spoken vows; sorrow might come to them after this, and it did. They might doubt all the world, but never each other, after that.

The pale moon-rays shimmered about them; the shadows came and went. They rode slowly, for they did not fear pursuit, as yet, and she told him the story of her life from the time when every friend she had in all the earth was murdered. She saw that something must be done to keep herself free from a captive's common fate, and so, by means of a mind naturally

acute, she was soon able to take a stand from which she could defy even Meton. It was her desire to escape which eventually caused her to lose caste.

They rode all night. Where, they had no thought; in what direction even, they did not know; but morning found them many miles away. Charles saw with joy that his rifle still hung at the saddle-bow, with every thing complete for offense or defense. Ida had her rifle. He missed his revolver, and knew that Meton had taken the "short gun" for himself.

The morning sun rose up bright and full. Charles brought down a prairie-chicken with a small charge, and they made a hearty meal. All at once they heard a great clamor, and, looking eastward, they saw a party of four, hotly pursued by a large band of Indians. As they approached, Charles recognized them, and greeted them with a glad cry.

"Mount," cried Dolf, as they rode up, "and ride for your life."

"Not that way," replied the other. "You will run into the jaws of the Crows. Keep to the right."

Dolf cast a single look at Ida and then said, in a low tone: "Now, then, here is something to fight for." They rode at their best speed, the wonderful mule keeping up with Charlie's black with the greatest ease.

The Indians, who were Blackfeet, gave up the chase. They uttered a whoop of anger, and rode off at full speed in the opposite direction, then their pace subsided to a walk, and the boys got around Charlie to shake hands, and congratulated him on his escape.

"I say, lad," said Rube, "wasn't Meton there?"

"Yes."

"How many men has he now?"

"About thirty."

"No mor'n that?"

"No."

"I reckon, then, it's 'bout time fer us to settle up. I've waited a mighty long while, an' I ain't hed no good chance as yet. This young woman, I take it, is the one as we hev' been tryin' to git away from the Crows."

"Yes."

"She don't know me. I didn't calculate she would. How should she? P'raps she knows that some one hes been workin' fer her all these years, but she don't know who it is."

"Is this Rube?" said Ida; "the brave hunter who wept over my dead mother?"

"The very one," said Charlie.

She bent closer and kissed him on the cheek. The man started, as if a thunder-bolt had struck him; he put up his hand, with a sudden motion, as one in a dream. Then, seeming to realize the truth, that she was grateful to him for what he had done, and had taken this way to show it, he dropped his head upon the neck of the stubborn mule and burst into tears. His heart was rough, but true, and such a thing touched him to this degree.

She rode closer still and took his hand.

"Good, kind, faithful man, do you wonder that I am grateful for your kindness to

me and mine? I can not forget that your hand laid my sainted mother in the grave—that your tears were shed above her. Never forget that my very life is at your service for this."

"Don't!" he said, putting out his other hand with an appealing gesture. "'Tain't right. I ain't done nothin' that a man, calling himself one, would hev' left undone."

"What is our next movement?" broke in Dolf, relieving the poor fellow. "Shall we look out another herd of buffalo?"

"The plain is getting hot for us," said Rube. "It's many a long year sense I have bin so hard put to it as I hev' the last two days; but it's jest as you say about it. Ef you boys ar' fer more huntin', very good; I live here; but if you hev' enough of it, then back we go to the towns."

"Vote," said Dolf. "All in favor of staying here hold up your right hands; four! Very good. Contrary by the same sign—Charlie and Miss Ida! Umph! In a hurry to get back, are you, Master Charles? I don't wonder; but you are outvoted, two to one."

"Miss Ida?" said a tremulous voice.

She turned at the sound. As yet she had not looked at the black, who, standing apart, had been devouring her with his eyes. A flash of recognition passed over her face as she looked into the honest eyes, brim-full of love and devotion to her. Both hands were stretched out toward him, and he, going down on his knees, covered them with kisses.

"Jake," she said, "I thought you died, that fearful night."

"T'ought so myself, missee, most. He sabs me. Nebber forget dat night, Missie Ida."

"I am glad to see you, Jake; more so because you were with us there. Were you out there when they buried my dear parents?"

"Yes, Missie Ida, I was dar'. You don't no how much you got to t'ank Mass'r Rube. He bashful in talkin' to ladies, but he's good. Don't want to know any better feller dan he be. He buried mudder and fader in one grave, and de two brudders in anudder, and dar' dey sleep yet; saw de place yesterday."

"Is it near at hand?" she asked, starting quickly.

"Tain't fur off. We been ridin' roun' an' roun', but we ain't gone fur away from it."

"Can you guide me to the place?"

"Rube kin. He mark de place so dat he know it ag'in. He kin find it, sure."

"And will you?" she asked, turning to the hunter, who was busy with his rifle. He looked up.

"If you wish it. There' ain't many things I wouldn't do for you, miss."

In his rough, honest way, the heart of the brave fellow adored her. Don't misunderstand him. He did not presume to love her; but, there sprung up in his heart such a feeling as a mortal might have toward a spirit, as a thing beautiful and noble, but far beyond reach.

"Do you want ter go ther?" he repeated.

"Oh yes, yes. I long to see the spot where they repose. Don't refuse ma."

"I ain't goin' to. Boys, you hear orders, don't you? Make ready to march."

CHAPTER V.

The Graves.

THEY fell into rank, riding two and two, with Ida by the side of the hunter, who was pointing out familiar spots as he went along. After a while he pointed to a little clump of bushes, saying:

"See thar, don't you? Thar's whar' I were chased by a buffler."

"Were you hurt?"

"Not much, but I were pretty considerably scared, now I tell ye. I mought as well tell ye the story to pass away time. Thet were fifteen year ago, an' I ain't fergot it, no, nor won't as long as this yer old carcass holds together. I were young, an' risky, an' didn't take no sort of care of myself. I hed been out with some friends arter game, an' arter a while, seein' we couldn't find any, we 'greed to sep'rate, an' meet at this yer clump, as both on us knew it well.

"They went off one way, and I went another. And arter searchin' about, I med' my way toward this clump. As I kem' near it, what should I see but an old buffler cow and calf, standin' 'bout a hundred yards from the bushes. I jest made up my mind to hev' them both, so I pulled up, an' let the calf hev' it. He dropped in a minute. I knowed that 'ud keep the other by him, for she stood stock-still, never budgin' an inch, turnin' over the dead body with her horns. I stepped out as soon as my rifle were loaded, and gave her one. It warn't a hard hit, by no means, and it jest made her mad, at the same time showin' her whar' I was. She jest gev' a roar, and made fer me as quick as she could go. I hed nothin' to do but run fer it, an' I didn't stan' much chance either, fer the brute were mad, I kin tell ye. I put fer the bushes, an' we went round them lively. I thort ov a prayer I heard a missioner' say once, fer I thort my time were come, sure enough.

"Arter a while I begin to git tired, and the blamed buffler looked as fresh as ever. I looked over my shoulder at her as I ran. Like a dum'ed fool, I hed left my shot-pouch on the ground, 'bout half a dozen yards from the bushes. But how was I goin' to git it? Ef I hed thet I might load ag'in while I run, and bring her down by a quick shot. But, I couldn't see how ter git her.

"I hed a blankit, an' I hed dropped it when I hed run round once. As I run past it this time, suthin' whispered ter me what to do, an' I did it. When I kem' round ag'in I snatched up the blanket, an' turned on the buffler. She didn't see me, but kem' on with her head down, an' I slipped the blankit over her horns, and ran for my pouch. I 'spected to hear the tramp of the blamed thing in half a minnit, but I didn't, an', lookin' over my shoulder, thar was one of the most comical things you ever see a-goin' on. The buffler didn't hev' time ter stop 'runnin', until she hed stuck her feet through the blanket, and she were as fast as a buffler could well be, rollin'

over an' over like thunder, and roarin' all the time; I loaded as fast as I could, fer the blankit was goin' to flinders, an' ran up and gev' her the charge under the shoulder. Thet settled her, an' she went to sleep as quiet as a lamb. The fellers cum' 'thout a hair to show, an' I hed my game all ready fer 'em."

"Quite an adventure, Rube. Any more of the same sort?" said Dolf.

"Not now. Here we are at the place I told you about. These trees are the ones whar' I went to sleep, an' out yonder, on thet plain, whar' you see the white stum', was the camp of the whites. If ye'll come with me, Miss Ida, I will show ye whar' I laid her."

Ida cast an appealing look at the others, and they kept back, not wishing to intrude upon her grief. They saw the hunter lay his hand reverently upon the white stone, and then he came away. There was a suspicious drop of moisture in his eye as he came back, and busied himself with his saddle-girths. She, out by those lonely graves, cast herself down upon the prairie-grass, which had been reddened years ago by the blood of all her kindred, and prayed silently for the souls of the fallen. Her age, when taken by the Crows, had been such as to preclude all possibility of a deadening of her religious sensibilities; she still was a Christian.

What recollections crowded into her mind as she sat there beside her parents' graves? What hopes of happiness had been blighted on that terrible night? They had hoped, tired of the world and its people, to find a nappy and peaceful home, away beyond the "Big Blue." The tomahawk of the savage had too early broken their dream, and she, their daughter, wept above their graves.

How her heart cried out over the recollection of those sleeping so peacefully under that prairie-turf. She went back to her friends, and they, at her intercession cut upon the stone the names of her parents, and to this day, those who pass that way may read:

"JAMES AND ADALINE LEE,
AND THEIR SONS, WILLIAM AND ARTHUR,
Murdered, May 15, 1847."

Rest well, early martyred, under that soil! The plow, in after years, may go above you, but not yet. The Indian steed, the buffalo and the deer, may come and go, but your rest will be all the sweeter, that you do not sleep in a crowded churchyard.

Next day the party went out to hunt, leaving Charles and Ida to keep camp. It seemed to be pretty generally understood that this arrangement would suit all parties concerned. They went toward the Black Hills, expecting to fall in with buffalo. They were not disappointed. A small herd were feeding in a secluded glen, close to the edge of the hills, with the river flowing on one side, and the hills on the other. Hanging upon the outskirts of the herd, a half-dozen coyotes might be seen, hungrily regarding the animals. Some of these "prairie-hyenas" near at hand, scuttled rapidly away at the approach of the hunters, giving the short, quick bark peculiar to them. The hunter pointed at them with a laugh:

"Does yer see those varmint sittin' on

ther ha'nches an' lookin' at us? Now, they knows, jest as well as we does, thet we are after them buffler. An' they knows 'at we will kill more'n we'll carry away, thet they do, an' they is waitin' for a share. Keep to the right, my boy."

The last paternal instruction was extended to Dolf, who was inclining to the left, from whence the wind blew fresh toward the herd. It was not a large one, consisting of a couple of dozen of all sizes. As usual, two or three males, of ponderous size, were feeding on the outskirts of the herd, and looking suspiciously on every side. They could not have chosen a more advantageous position. It seemed impossible to get near enough for a shot.

"It must be done," said Rube. "Our only chance is a little trick. Give me that robe, will you, Jake?"

The individual addressed handed the article required to Rube. It was the hide of a buffalo entire, with the horns remaining. To their surprise, he proceeded to invest Syntax in this strange dress. The animal looked more sedate than ever. Her neck bowed more humbly to the burden. When Rube had completed his work, all burst into a laugh at the comical metamorphosis. Instead of the mustang, False Syntax, we had a fine buffalo to all appearances.

Before mounting his strange steed the hunter gave them directions where to stand. He had thrown off his saddle, and lengthened his bridle, which was hidden by the hairy front. He mounted, throwing his body along the side of the animal, out of sight of the herd.

Taking care to keep the other side turned toward the watchful males, he came slowly down upon the herd, while the stern guards looked at him angrily from under their shaggy brows. Evidently they thought him some impudent intruder, and hoofs began to beat the ground angrily, and tails flourished more briskly, as he approached.

The wonderful mule showed his training. Had the young men not seen him leave them, they would have said that two buffalo bulls were approaching each other, stamping the ground, and preparing for a conflict. All at once, from the side of one, puffed out a column of smoke, and a whiplike crack smote upon their ears. Rube never fired twice at the same buffalo, and they were not surprised to see one of the guards sink to the earth, never to rise again.

The herd were startled by the sound. In all probability they never before had heard a rifle, and after a little began to feed again, while another of the males approached the intruder, snorting fiercely, and pawing up the earth.

Again the white smoke puffed out from the side of the disguised animal, and another patriarch measured his length upon the sod. The coyotes crept slowly up toward the herd. All at once the trained mustang lost his shaggy covering and bounded away, for the herd was taking the alarm, and gathering for a rush. "Get ready!" shouted Rube, as he dashed up to them; "they will come on now. Ha! what is that?"

A bull, upon the skirts of the herd, was seen to stagger, and fall prostrate upon the

earth. Rube snatched up his bullet-pouch and began to load.

"Injins!" It was all he said, but the young men knew he did not speak in vain. Yet they could see nothing but the herd, the coyotes, and the verdant plain.

"Yer don't see them, boys. I'm a blamed fool, er I'd a' thought of thet. Do yer see thet coyote yonder, clus ter the herd? Thet is an Injin with a wolf-hide onto him. I'd like ter know how many ther ar' of them."

Shall we give up our meat on their account?" cried Dolf. "Let's drive the greasy knaves away."

"Softly, softly, my lad. An Injin arrer kin kill, as well as a bullet, at a short range. I'm thinkin' ther's a good crowd of them, or they'd never hev' staid ther' so 'long, after they found out we was on hand. I'm not the man ter give up our meat 'thout a fight. At any rate, they calculate we don't see them, an they ain't seen anybody but me. I calculate we'll fool them yit. Jake?"

"W'at say, Rube?"

"Go in ther' an' collar thet Injin in ther wolf-hide an bring him in."

"Git out, you! W'at ye t'ink I med' of, you Rube? Cast-iron, prob'ly. Ain't, though. Don't wan' to get me killed, s'pose, does yer?"

"Yer won't hev' sech a chance all yer life. Ha! here comes the herd. Get out of ther' way, every man. Ha! ha! see them blamed Injins go."

The wolves were getting out of the way of the rush at an odd pace, something between the run of a wolf and the gait of a rabbit. They had not calculated on being pushed, and were just able to escape.

Jake stopped to watch them, laughing aloud, and forgetting utterly his own position. The rest rode out to the skirts of the herd, and, as they turned to look, behold, the negro was in the midst of the herd, borne on by their rush, and his legs so bound against the sides of his horse, that he could not budge an inch! The wolves were out of sight, but, all at once, with a bedlam-like howl, they reappeared, a score of mounted savages, shaking their spears in the air. It was the same band who had chased the party the day before—Blackfeet. Knowing the speed of their horses, they did not pursue when the hunters turned in flight, but chased the flying herd.

They could see them upon the skirts of the herd, pouring in their arrows, and they knew that the black was doomed, for all they could do to aid him.

They turned toward the camp, sorrowfully enough. As they approached it, a fear took possession of them. They hurried on. The camp was utterly forsaken!

"It is a trick," cried Dolf. "They are hiding somewhere. Come out, Charlie; no skulking, you know."

Only the echoes answered him.

"Come, come, that will do," he repeated. "What is the use? You promised to have something for us to eat when we came back."

"I don't like the looks of this at all," said Willie. "Do you think it is a trick, Rube?"

The hunter shook his head. "No, no

in this country yer can't count on any thing. It's Injin deviltry, or I'm much mistaken. And yet, I don't see any trail."

"There must be one; spread out and find it." They strayed in all directions over the prairie, and came back with blank faces. "You haven't been out by the graves," said Willie. Rube had forgotten that, and now walked out in that direction. When they reached the spot, they saw him stoop and examine the earth intently, and then he rose and beckoned them to come out. They ran to him and found him bending over fresh blood-stains on the ground. Near the graves the earth was trampled and the grass crushed by many feet; and there, right across the grave, were fresh blood-stains. Whose blood? Their hearts stood still.

"It seems as if fate was working against poor Charlie," said Willie, choking down a sob. "Here he is taken again, and, perhaps, wounded."

"This yer ain't his blood!" said Rube.

"How do you know that?"

"Easy enough. Yer look here, you will see whar the heel of a pa'r of moccasins hes dug into ther sile. Thet Injin is the one who were wounded. I'm sure of it. 'Sides, Injin blood ain't like white blood, no-how."

"Where's the difference?"

"Ain't ther' a difference in ther' hides? Wal, ef thar's a difference in ther' hides, it stan's to reason thet ther' sh'ud be a difference in ther' blood as well. Yer don't pretend to say thet the same kind er blood flows in Miss Ida's veins as ther' does in Meton's? No, there's as much difference ez ther' is 'tween prime whisky and rotten vinegar. This yer is black blood—an Injin lost it."

"How many were there of them?"

"Can't tell, yit. Wait till I go round."

The hunter walked about the place for some minutes, and came back with a very decided look on his face.

"You know all about it," said Dolf; "I can see it in your face."

"Yes, I think I can see it. The two kem' out here by the graves to talk, an' the cowardly brutes crept up behind them. Two of them went under, I take it, before they c'd take the boy. But they've got him, and ar' off for the Crow country."

"What shall we do?"

"Foller them," answered the hunter, sternly. "I ain't redeemed my vow yit."

"How do you know it is Meton? Might it not be the Blackfeet, now?" said Dolf.

Rube looked at him in silent wrath for a half-minute, while Dolf, who had again committed the "unpardonable sin," shrunk away, and hastened to apologize.

"Don't get mad, now, Rube, please. You know I was born a doubter, and I can't help it, the best way I can fix it. I only meant it as a question."

"Put it as a question, then. How do I know thet it is Meton? 'Cause here is his hoss-track, plain as day. An' here are a dozen other marks. But we ain't got no time to lose. In my way of thinkin', we've got a long trail to foller, and it will bring us to the Crow country. We'll save them, or die a tryin'."

CHAPTER VI.

On the Trail Again.

"LET's go at this yer' as if it were an all-day job, boys," said Rube. "Let's look at the case as it stands. These yer' scamps hes taken our friends, and we are bound to take them back. Thet's all right—thet's just as it should be. We wouldn't be half men if we didn't save them. Now, then, for the best way. We mought ketch up to them, by ridin' hard, before they got to their village. I say we mought do this, but would it pay best?"

"Why not?" said Dolf. "If they get to the Crow village we will never get them out. There are only three of us now."

"Thet's jest it; an' ef we hed a dozen, enough to whip the Crows out an' out, then I mought be fer ridin' hard an' ketchin' them. But, the way it is, we can't fight. Now, I s'pose you hed med' up yer mind to ride inter the Crow country, inter the village, and take them out in the face of the Crown nation. No good ter think thet way. Ther' is only one way to do it, and thet by tricks. We may get snapped up ourselves in tryin' ter do it, but thet is as it happens. We must try. And we must 'member thet any thing happening to us is death ter them. So a.l I can say, is, *be car'ful*."

The trail was a wide one. Evidently the Indians had no fear of the now weak party. They did not calculate on what might be done by brave men. That the three would be foolhardy enough to follow them was beyond their thought.

"Yer see how it is," said Rube, as they rode on. "They don't think we'll foller. Thet's jest like an Injin, right over. They'd desert a friend ef they was in danger, and they think whites ain't human no more then they ar'. We'll try thet before we're done with 'em. I'm sorry about poor Jake. The feller hes been with us in a many tight places; an' though he were always scar't nigh about to death, he never turned fully white yit. I 'member one scrape he hed with a grizzly. 'Twas nigh on to three y'ars ago, an' we were up on the Missouri, after beaver. 'Twere a hard winter, an' we built up a hut of boughs an' covered it with bark, an' calculated to stay until we had taken all the pelts in thet part of the stream. Beavers seemed to walk inter our traps thet year, an' we hed nothin' ter do but take them out and bait ag'in. This yer kept a goin' till our meat began ter run low, an' we hated ter leave, fer beaver never were so hungry as them. So, one day, I tuk my rifle, and left him ter keep camp while I med' a stroke fer a deer. I calculated I mought find one up on the mountains, summers, and then we c'd get along another week."

"Jake hed a great notion fer comfort, so he built a fire, and set down on a log by it. Arter a while he concluded 'at he would go out and look at the traps near by. He got a good load of beaver, an' was a-bringin' them in, ter skin 'em comfortably by the fire, when, just as he stuck his nose inter the lodge-door, he heard a growl, and, look in' in, thar' were the biggest grizzly these yer eyes ever saw, a-toastin' hisself by the

blaze, and lookin' pleased as possible over it. He showed his white teeth, and giv' a growl which sent Jake flyin' out of the hut, an' down the bank to ther ice; then he looked back and saw that the b'ar didn't foller him, and, after a while, he sneaked back to ther hut, an' thar' the grizzly sot, lookin' inter the fire, an' feelin' as much at home as ef he hed been in his cave. It med' Jake mad to see him sit thar', and he 'gan to call him all the names he could lay his tongue to. Grizzly looked up, when he heard his voice, an' growled ag'in, but showed no signs of getting tired of his snug quarters.

"Jest think of it. The poor nigger out in the cold, with his teeth chatterin', and that blamed b'ar settin' on his ha'nches an' enjoyin' the fire! After a while, the old fellow made up his mind that it would be a good plan to make a meal of Jake, so he came lumberin' out of the door an' chased him.

"Boys, you hev' never seen a grizzly, and you don't know how he kin run. Jake was goin' for his life, but, for all that, the b'ar gained on him every step. But he got to a sapling, clum' it, an' left Mr. B'ar gnashing his teeth at the bottom.

"For a while he amused himself by rearing on his hind-legs and lookin' up at Jake, who, thinkin' he were safe enough, laughed, and begun to call him names ag'in. After a while he laid down under the tree, an' put his muzzle on his paws, and looked up at him, as much as to say, "All right, Jake—you won't come down. Suit yourself as to time, for I can wait.

"Tain't necessary fer me to tell yer Jake didn't like that. He begun to find, too, after half an hour, thet 'twan't pleasant roostin' on a limb in cold December weather, and a warm fire shinin' out upon the snow from the door of the hut. Things begun to look blue enough. He looked at the b'ar, and begun to calculate his chances in a fight; then he looked at the long teeth an' sharp claws, and dassent try it.

"The tree was a hemlock, an' long limbs reached out an' almost touched the ground. His gun were a-standin' in the door. Ef he c'u'd only git it, he would risk his life for a shot at his inimy.

"It seemed to grow colder, and his blood were like ice. Was yer ever nearly froze? Well, I hes been, an' I know 'tain't pleasant. Jake didn't like it, neither.

"Bymeby he 'gin to holler. He thort he might make me hear, ef I were not too fur away; but, Lord! I were miles away, among the hills, an' couldn't a' heard him, anyhow, fer I hed followed a deer out of range; but he hollered till he was hoarse, and his legs felt like iron rods. After a while he got up, and begun to climb up an' down the tree. Thet was a good idea, an' pretty soon he was warm as toast, an' his blood begun flowin' ag'in.

"All this time the b'ar never stirred, and Jake kept callin' of him names. 'You ole rip!' he said, 'you's afraid, you is; you's afraid, you is; you dassent go 'way an' let me get rifle. Lemme get gun once, me fixie you, ole fool! T'ink yer smart, don't yer? Well, yer ain't. Yer ain't half so smart as yer cracked up to be; nothin' but

a lean old grizzly, with a black face, long as my arm. I dar's you to take a stump! Go out by dat stump an' wait till I come.' That's the sort of talk he gev' the b'ar; but the old fellow never minded it at all, but jest laid still an' looked at him with eyes twinklin'.

"Strange things happen sometimes. The b'ar got up, after a while, an' began to snort, jest as they will when they're mad. Jake knew somethin' were comin'; what it were he couldn't tell; but the b'ar was afeard.

"Pretty soon he heard a crawlin' sound, and the b'ar got up on his hind-feet to look. The sound kem' nearer, and then one of the biggest painters you ever laid eyes on jumped up on the limb, close to the nigger. Thet were worse then the b'ar, Jake thort, but he hoped the old fellow wouldn't see him, so he jest laid still and scarcely breathed. The painter were lookin' at the b'ar, and didn't notice Jake at all, who was shakin' fit to take the tree down. Bymeby the painter gev' a yell thet med' the old darkey jump about three feet from the limb. The painter had tackled the b'ar. Jake knew thet were his time, and when the painter dropped onto the b'ar, he tumbled outer the tree, and went inter the hut flyin'. This time he shut the door and piled logs against it, an' then looked out at the fight.

"Boys, thar' ain't nothin' like it in natur'. I saw sich a fight once, and it fairly med' my ha'r stand on end. Sich yellin', sich scratchin', sich fightin'! Every oncet in a while the painter 'ud fly up inter the tree, like a bird, an' the old grizzly 'ud stand up on his hind-legs, an' wait fur him. Then they'd close, and the ha'r and blood would fly for about a minnit, when they would break away, and try it over.

"Fire and blood. Thet is the way it looked to Jake. The snow were red for yards around, an' they were both growing weak. After a while the old b'ar got him in his fore-paws, and begun to work his hind ones as ef he were workin' a tread-mill. At the same time, the painter's teeth met in his throat. They stood locked in this way fer some time, an' then both kem' to the snow with a crash. Jake fired one or two shots at 'em, ter mek' sure that they were gone up, an' then kem' out. The inside of that painter was taken out as neat as you ever cleaned a trout, an' the windpipe of the b'ar was bitten clean in two. 'Tain't no wonder they was played out. Jake put a couple of balls inter them, to make sure, and then dragged them into the hut. I kem' back without any meat, an' Jake showed me his b'ar-meat, but he didn't take pride in it, an' told me he never was so scar't in his born days. Do you see the track of Charlie's horse on that side, my lad?"

"Yes," replied Dolf, "here it is."

"Good. These fellows leave a broad trail. Have yer any brandy in that canteen, Willie? I'm dry after talkin'."

Willie handed him the flask, and he took a hearty pull and then bent his eyes on the trail.

"How fur we shill hev' to ride is plain, now. They're makin' straight fer Powder river. Meton's town is about three miles

from thet, an' probably the easiest place to hide near in the whole Crow kentry. I ain't afeard but we kin take them out of thet village. Don't let's be in a hurry. They're jest about three hours ahead of us now, an' we needn't to hurry ourselves. Twon't do to get too near, you know. I'm hungry; how is it with you?"

They halted, built a fire, and prepared a meal from some jerked venison in the possession of Rube. It was not a very good repast, but they were hungry, and did not care to fire their rifles, as sound is borne to such a distance on the plains. But, Rube would not starve in the midst of plenty, and so he took his rifle, and went out to try for game, taking Dolf with him. Upon second thought, he left his rifle, and carried a long bow which Willie had purchased at Leavenworth, for what purpose it was hard to tell.

"I'm goin' to teach you how to stalk deer, my lad," said he. "I didn't take the rifle, fer we're done with thet now until we hev' our friends with us. But, we *must* hev' meat, an' I hev' a notion thet buck-tails ain't very fur off. It's jest the country fer them, an' we will hev' one or two."

The land through which they were passing was rolling, and covered with a growth of low trees. Rube led the way with quick strides, for he did not like to leave Willie too long alone. That individual, with praiseworthy caution, led the animals into a thicket, fastened them to separate trees, and then laid down for a rest, from which he was awakened by the return of the hunting party, bearing a doe between them on a pole. Rube had stalked him on the mountain and brought him down with an arrow. A pretty fawn followed Dolf like a dog, while he looked down compassionately upon her.

They prepared and finished another meal at once, regardless of the fact that they had just dined. This done, as night was coming on, they laid down to rest upon the trail. The fawn lay down by Dolf's side, and laid her head upon his hand. He was up next morning before the rest, and at work very busily. By this time all were fully awake; they found that he had been making up some cakes from a little flour he had carried in a package so far, and was feeding the fawn.

"Isn't she pretty?" he said. "Poor little thing; I hate to leave her."

They mounted and rode off, but to their surprise the fawn trotted along by their horses' sides, and would not leave them. "Poor critter," said Rube. "It's nat'ral thet she should want some one to take care on her, seein' thet we've killed her mother. Tain't often they take to murderers so well, though."

And so the fawn kept up with them, looking up from time to time into Dolf's face, and watching his every motion with her luminous eyes. They rode again all day, and when they laid down to rest, the fawn again went to him, and laid her head upon his arm while he slept.

CHAPTER VII.

The Crow Council

NESTLING down among the hills, a few leagues from Powder river, among the Panther Mountains, lay the village ruled by Meton. It numbered three hundred lodges, and was beautifully situated upon the shores of a small lake, peculiar to that region—a beautiful little lake, whose glimmering surface shone clearly among the leaves, contrasting with their brilliant green. To the east, through a gap in the mountains, Powder river could be seen flowing downward to unite its waters and mingle with those of the Great river.

The village was alive with excitement, for a swift rider had come in to say that Meton was coming, with buffalo-meat, and prisoners. Squaws were running to and fro, jabbering at the tops of their voices, and preparing for the return of their lords. Visions of the post, the fagot, and the torch danced before their delighted eyes. With the innate cruelty of their thoroughly savage natures, they longed for the torture.

The hunters came in about noon, and brought with them Charlie and Ida. They had been taken at the graves of her parents, after a hard struggle on his part, and the death of two of their number by his hand. They had another prisoner, the brave who had been taken on the day of that fight upon the prairie, when they were first taken. The Crows had lost their veneration for the prophetess in some respects, for they had guarded her strictly on the march. But, as they came into the village, one of the old men advanced with stately grace, led her into her own lodge, spread the skins that she might rest, and went out with sedate steps. The other prisoners were strongly bound. One of the old braves looked at the young Crow, and said:

"Why is my son bound?"

It was his father.

"You will know at the council," replied Meton, fiercely. But the young brave cried out:

"He shall know *now*! Behold! Meton, he has slain the rest, and now brings me in a prisoner. He is worthy to die."

"What has my son been doing?"

"I would not give up the prophetess into his hands."

"Let the prisoners go into the lodge," said Meton, making an imperious gesture with his hands. They were carried into a lodge, still securely bound, while a strong guard of Meton's own adherents was placed about it on every side. The braves scattered into groups through the village, conversing with one another on the events of the week. The old men, with their usual stolidity, asked no questions, although many missed sons from the ranks of the warriors.

The council was called at night. Both prisoners were brought forth and bound to posts before the principal lodge. Charlie looked for Ida; was she there? He could not see her at first, for her face was turned away and her dress was that of the squaws. After a while he saw her leave the crowd

of women, and take her place in the council. On a sort of raised throne of skins, upon the side of the fire opposite him, he saw her take her seat, while two old men, patriarchs of their tribe, sat on her right hand and on her left. A murmur of delight ran through the multitude as they saw her thus enthroned. Her eyes were downcast, except one look flashed quickly across the intervening space, which plainly said, "Courage! Hope!"

The great fire began to blaze fiercely, and then a horn sounded three times. At the third summons, one arose and called the name of a warrior. No answer. A roll was called, twelve in number, but no answer was returned. The young brave at the stake started suddenly, for he knew the names. It was the death-roll of the fallen. Ida rose.

"Answer they not, my brother?"

"No, great prophetess."

"Where shall we seek for them?" she said, sinking back into her seat.

This was the method of their council, and the last question gave those who knew any thing of their fate to speak for themselves.

One after another the braves rose and answered for the fallen. Then the old chief on Ida's right arose.

"Have we then a traitor among us?"

"We have," said Meton.

"What says the prophetess to this?"

"Let him be brought before us and we will judge him by our law," she answered, faintly.

A movement was made by several warriors in the direction of the place where the prisoner stood. The young Crow was unbound and led to the center of the circle. Meton stood up, pointing to him with a malignant finger, saying, "Behold the traitor!"

The young warrior stood erect, with his arms folded across his manly breast, which rose and fell with regular pulsations, as if his blood could not be quickened by the near approach of death. Not a muscle of his face was convulsed; only a haughty firmness dwelt in eye and lip, as if he had nerved himself to meet the worst.

"Let my young brother speak," said the silver voice of Ida, "and tell us how he came here bound and a prisoner."

"Great prophetess," he said, "let my accuser speak first, and then I will answer. Let the forked tongue of the 'Moose' finish what he has to say. *He is a liar!*"

Meton clutched at the handle of the hatchet. The young prisoner smiled.

"Let Meton speak," said Ida. "He hears the words of the young brother."

"Why should I waste time," he asked; "yonder traitor must die; and yet it is well that he know that his death is just. My fathers, you sent your young men out to hunt the buffalo. They were ready to go, for the squaws and papposes needed meat. The prophetess said, 'Let me, too, go out to the hunt with you.' Meton said, 'It is well, let the prophetess come.' She took with her the men you had given to be always near her and protect her from harm. You chose them because they were brave. But they were as snakes in the grass; they were as Blackfeet, enemies of the Crow.

"We hunted the buffalo upon the plains, and, at morning, we looked for the prophetess, and she was gone! We looked long, at last, we found her; but she was *not alone*. The white man of the short gun was with her. We asked them to give her up to us; but they bade us go back, her face no more. How should the Crows live when the great light of the village had gone out? We told them we must have the prophetess. They would not give her up.

"My fathers, what could we do?" We fought them all day. At night many of us were dead, and we had not harmed them. At night we took them, and all were slain but these. My fathers, it grieved the soul of Meton that he must shed the blood of a Crow warrior; but it was done, and the others will come back no more."

There was a deep murmur of discontent from the better half of the audience, for all the village had formed a deep circle around the ring of chiefs and old men. The young men who had been slain were the bravest of the tribe, chosen for comeliness of person and strength of limb, to be the body-guard of the prophetess. Plainly, Meton had not made a good impression. He saw this, and began to be angry.

"I look about me, and many faces that were with me are gone from my sight. Where is the friend of my youth, who has fought with me in a hundred battles? He fell by the long rifle of yonder white man, and the coyotes will make merry over his bones."

An angry buzz rose from the adherents of Meton, and fierce looks were exchanged by the two factions. Then the young prisoner spoke, for Meton had seated himself, pleased at the impression he at last had made.

"The forked tongue is silent, and now will I speak. What right had I to do as I have done, let my words show. I was chosen to be one of the guards to our great prophetess. Good; that was more than I deserved, and I was proud. I loved the prophetess. I was ready to die for her good. So were my brothers, whom the forked tongue murdered on the plains. I took no command from him. The prophetess said, 'Come, let us go.' I did not ask her where she was going. I was not put there to ask, but to *obey*. We went away, and next day, men, painted like Blackfeet, said the prophetess must be given up to them. Why should *he* put on the dress of a Blackfoot? We would not give her up to his hands. He fought us, and was beaten. He lighted the prairie-grass, to burn us where we stood."

A perfect roar of rage broke out from the faction of Ida, and many of the others now joined hoarsely in the cry. In truth, the power of this girl over the village was wonderful. They revered her as akin to Deity. It is no wonder, for her remarkable beauty and grace had won their hearts years before. And when they heard that the prophetess had been in danger, their anger found vent in these expressions. A malignant scowl deepened upon the face of Meton, as he turned angrily aside.

"He lighted the prairie-grass," went on 'the Hawk,' as the young chief was called.

"and we were in danger, but the Good Spirit helped us to turn aside the flame, and we escaped. The white man was with us, and he fought for the prophetess. At night, like Blackfeet, they came, and murdered my brothers, and took away the prophetess. She escaped out of their hands that night, and they took her again next day. Behold, she is here. Let her say if all this is not true."

In all this subtle speech, not a word had been said that could be forced into the construction that he was aware of Ida's desire to escape. He was particularly careful to say nothing of this kind, as that would have done his cause great harm. Ida rose, flung back the mass of raven hair with one hand, while she stretched out the other persuasively toward the people.

How she talked to them! Sweetly as though they had been children whom she loved! The rough warriors were moved, and looked from man to man. She spoke of her guard; how she loved them; how brave they were; how devoted to her cause. Then she spoke of the fight upon the prairie, when she would not give herself up to men in the paint of Blackfeet.

This masterpiece of strategy, laying so much stress upon the fact that they took the guise of Blackfeet, the inveterate enemy of the Crow, had the desired effect. And when she went on to tell of the successful repulse, of the fire-wall bearing down upon them, of the night-struggle, and the death of her guard, she had wound them to a pitch of the wildest excitement. She concluded:

"And shall this young chief die, because he was faithful to me? Could any of you go to the happy hunting-grounds, if you took away his life? And what shall we say of the Snake, who murdered your brothers? It was not our bullets that laid them low. No, no! But Meton led them on to death. I say, let the Hawk go free, and let Meton take his place. He is the traitor here."

"Let the chiefs who say that the Hawk has done no harm, arise with me," said the old chief on her left. Nearly every man in the circle rose to his feet. Then Ida rose, and said to the Hawk, "Go free." He came to her, and, kneeling at her feet, bowed his head. She put her hands upon the bowed head and said he was free from stain. Then he rose, and went down among his friends, while Meton was seized, and placed in the stand he had occupied.

It is needless to tell what was said and done there. The usual number of partisan speeches were heard; and, at last, that grave jury deputed one to be spokesman for the whole. The gray-haired man on the right stood up, and turning full upon Meton, addressed him in these words:

"My son is not old, but he has a bad heart. For years his heart has been the same, and now it has come to this. We would have peace in our village. Why should there be murder while we have a great prophetess among us. We do not love bloodshed. We would not have it so. But, my son is never weary of taking scalps. Now he comes to us, and what scalps has he in his belt? Not those of the Blackfoot taken in the fight, spear against spear and shield to shield, but the scalps of his broth-

ers, and the friends of many here. My son, you have done very wrong; you have done a wrong to the Great Spirit and to us. We are very sorry. We have judged you by our law, and say you are worthy to die; but because you have been a chief, we bid you go out from our village, and come back to us no more."

The dusky Catiline arose, and faced the senate of brown peers. His eyes were bloodshot; his white teeth showed through his half-parted lips. He passed his hand unsteadily across his brow, as if something obstructed his vision. He leaned heavily upon the stake near which he stood. Hate, fear, anger, all the evil passions of his wild nature burned in his face. His malevolent glance hurried over the sea of faces, about him, and found many friendly to him, but none who dared to speak. The circle cried out with one voice:

"Go! Murderer, go!"

He spoke then, with a vindictive earnestness, recounting his services, and hurling defiance in their teeth. Then he went down, and passed from man to man, speaking hurried words to several. But he was hurried away. Looking back at them from a little distance, he spat venomously toward the crowd, shook his clenched hand in the air, and went on his exiled way.

A thrill ran through that savage assembly as the chief disappeared from view. They had no idea that he would take his disappointment kindly, or that they should not hear of him in his banishment. Indeed, they felt that half the tribe were with him in heart, and were grieved and angry at his banishment, and wished for his recall. But, these knew better than to resist the will of the council as it felt at present.

Boiling with rage, the chief climbed the mountains to the right of the village, coming up the valley, and looked down upon his native fields. Banishment! The now wild man of the woods grew sad indeed. Was he taking his last look at the spot where his life had been spent? He could not tell.

He was hungering after vengeance. He would return to his native village, and he would not come alone. He would come, with spear, knife, hatchet and blazing brand, and lay it desolate.

He was not long alone. One by one his friends came to join him on the hill. He could see from his perch that the council was broken up. Charlie had been taken back into the lodge, and the fire was out. He was angry, and foamed at the mouth, as he saw the Hawk walking about, giving orders as he should have done. This, then, was the end of all. The prophetess taken from him baulked of his revenge for the death of his friend, exiled from his home. He began to hate her.

That she loved Charlie he could see in every word, look and tone of her voice—in the pretty way she had of starting at his words, and turning her bright face toward him. Charlie should die.

The love of the Indian was a coarse passion, but it was not the less strong. Woe to the man who crossed his path!

His friends joined him. He questioned them as to what had been done. Who was chosen head chief in his place?

"The Hawk has taken the lodge of Meton," replied one. Meton bounded erect, as if in pain.

"The Hawk?"

"Yes."

"Head chief?"

"Yes."

Meton took his hatchet, and struck it into a log. "So will I cleave his head; so will my knife find his heart. Let us be watchful. Go back to the village, and make ready. When three suns are gone, meet me at this place and I will tell you what to do."

They went back to the village. They found more disaffected now, for there are politicians even among the Indians, and they had not all been satisfied with the election of the Hawk.

He spoke to Ida, standing on the doorway of their lodge,

"Meton is gone," she said.

"He will return," was the answer.

"Why do you think so?"

"He has many friends. He will come back, and blood will run in the streets of our village. I wish we had not been taken."

"How soon do you look for trouble?"

"Trouble is everywhere. We see a black cloud in the sky, and we say, behold, a storm comes. We see the flash of the lightning, and we wait for the thunder. Meton will come to claim you and his own right."

"And you?"

"While blood runs in the veins of the Hawk, you are safe from every harm."

She thanked him by a look of gratitude from her calm eyes, and the Indian was rewarded.

"What can you do for him?" she asked, softly.

"Nothing now."

"Will he die?"

He knew why she asked for the safety of Charlie. The savage had quick eyes, and he knew her love for the prisoner.

"I will do what I can," he answered.

"May I go in and see him now?"

Without a word, he led her to the door of the prison-lodge, made the guard stand aside, while she joined her lover. He had cast himself down upon the skins and was thinking of his home, beyond the distant hills. Was he sorry he had come to this dangerous plain? Was it enough of joy that he had found what he had sought, one to love him as he would be loved? He knew that Ida loved him. Years had not been passed, only days, and yet they loved as truly as if they had been lovers for many seasons. What would be his fate?

He did not hear her when she came in, for her footsteps awoke no echoes upon the floor of the lodge. But she came to him, and knelt at his side, placing a hand upon his. That startled him, and he roused himself to look into her earnest eyes, to listen to the music of her voice, and to say to his heart, that, whether life or death was in store for him, happiness or misery in the future, he did not regret the step he had taken. Her priceless love, her undying devotion, would lighten the burden he would have to fear, and clear the way for his weary feet into the promise of the coming day.

CHAPTER VIII.

Three against—Many.

THE hunters had followed Meton hard, and, on the morning of his exile, were cautiously making their way up to the Panther mountains. The old hunter knew every foot of the ground, nearly as well as the Indians themselves. They climbed the slope upon one side, and, from the crest shielding themselves behind the cliffs, they looked down upon the village. They had been lookers-on upon the council. They had seen, from far, the chief slowly leaving his native village. The telescope Dolf carried showed them that he shook a wrathful hand at the council as he departed. Plainly, Meton had come to grief.

But how? They kept the telescope on the village. The Hawk was receiving the oath of head chief. Charlie was there. "leaning against a post," Dolf said; "tied to it," corrected the old hunter. They could make out his features through the powerful glass, and there was an expression of unmistakable pleasure upon it. "He is all right," said Rube, as he handed the glass to Willie. "Come!"

They followed him down the mountain side to a cleft which opened suddenly at their feet, and ran down toward the plain. Into this cleft they walked, and kept on until they reached a small opening on the rock, looking black and grim in the shadow of the cleft.

"Give me the birch," said Rube.

A torch of birch-bark, which he had prepared earlier in the day, was handed to him by Willie. He lighted it, and at once passed into the black opening. They followed, and found themselves in a beautiful little cave, about a dozen feet square, and high enough to admit of their standing upright. The stalactites hung in great honeycomb-like masses from the roof, and the light of the torch was reflected from a thousand sparkling points.

"What a capital place to hide," said Dolf.

"Pretty good," said Rube, "but, not the place for me."

"Why, what are you going to do?"

"Look here."

He held down the torch in one corner of the cave. The others looked down, and saw another opening, as large as the first, and from it an inclined plane led downward into utter gloom. Dolf shuddered.

"Ugh! What a gloomy rat-hole! I hope you don't mean to go down there?"

For answer, he tied one end of a lariat, which he suddenly produced, around his waist, and put the other end into the others' hands. "If I jerk the rope three times," said he, "you may know there is something wrong, and pull me out."

He seated himself upon the sloping surface, and disappeared. The two remained above, and awaited in great anxiety for some time. At length the voice of Rube was heard.

"All right, lads, come down."

"How?"

"Do as I did; you will come quickly enough."

Dolf sat down upon the limestone, which inclined at an angle of about fifty degrees,

and in a moment's time, it seemed, landed at the feet of the hunter. Willie followed. Then both stood up, uttering an exclamation of delight.

The room in which they found themselves was a vast circular one in the very heart of the mountain. Like the small chamber, it was of limestone, and its beauty can scarcely be described. The floor was smooth and shapely, except where the stalagmites rose from it. The roof was an arch, and as the light flashed back from the many points, Willie thought of the "star-chamber" of Mammoth cave.

"How did you know of this, Rube?" he asked.

"Wal, as we hev' time, an' can't do any thing till night, I don't know but I may as well tell ye all about it. You see it were two year ago, an' I hed come into the Crow country, I may ez well tell ye, after that fellow Meton. I hed been larkin' round the village, and at night I went in.

"Jest as luck would hev' it, they chased me, and I ran down the mountain, and thought I would hide in the cleft. It were neck or nothin' with me, nothin' to spare either way; so, as I happened ter see the hole in the rock, I went inter it.

"I hed no notion how large the place was, and ran into one corner to hide. Fust I knew, I was off my feet, and sliding down thet stun'. I tell you boys, it were a scarey feelin', an' I never was in a tighter place. There I were, goin' down, down, down, it seemed a year, and every mean thing I ever done in all my life kem' up before me. It seemed as ef I saw my whole life while I were slidin' down, an' yit, you know, it don't take scarce a minnit. Wal, I struck bottom after a bit, an' when I found it I were safe—I begun to breathe.

"Tain't never very dark here—see." He extinguished the torch, and although objects in the cave looked indistinct, still there was sufficient light to move easily and quickly to all parts. The hunter went on with his story:

"I thort I c'u'dn't never git back up ther slide, an' I begin to cast about fer other ways to get out. Just then I c'u'd hear the Injins come into the outer cave, an' goin' to ther mouth of ther slide, I c'u'd see their torches. Then I knew 'twan't very fur up. One of 'em kem' to ther slide and looked down, but it didn't suit him, so he went away.

"When I kem' out, I hed a notion to see whether the place hed been explored by the Injins. I hed my lariat with me, as I always has, and when I left I tied it acrost the mouth, in such a way thet a man c'u'dn't slide down 'thout runnin' into it. When I kem' down, I found every thing straight, jest as I left it. Now, then, you stay here, while I go out and see to the hosses."

"How do you get up?"

"Ther sides of the slide ar' rough, an' you kin take hold with both hands and go up thet way. You keep still."

He left them, and they began to wander about the spacious room. All at once, it came into the head of Dolf that it would be a good idea to find where so much light came from. Climbing up the western slope a few feet, he came to a sort of ledge, per-

haps five feet wide, and up this he clambered, until he came to the opening from which the light entered.

The village lay in full view. The opening was in one of the rocky clefts common to these mountains, and in a spot inaccessible to the foot of man, or it would doubtless have been discovered before this time. Just before the opening the rock widened into a sort of platform, on which they could stand while observing the village.

"This is grand!" said Willie. "We can see every thing they do from this."

"Where did Rube leave the horses?"

"In a clump, just at the mountain foot. think he means to lead them into one of these clefts and feed them from time to time. It won't do for us to stay here long, though."

"We must save Charlie."

"Yes, we must save Charlie and her. If we save one, we must save the other. Isn't it strange that he should escape heart-whole from the pretty girls in the Empire State to find his fate out here?"

"It isn't wonderful that he loves her," said Dolf, warmly; "how could he help it?"

"Aha! my lad, is it there you are?" laughed Willie. "Take care, for you can't cut out Charlie, you know."

"Neither do I wish it. You will not misunderstand me. If she were not in love with him, I would raise heaven and earth but I would win her."

"Indeed! Well, let it pass. Both of them need our help, God knows. When they are saved, then let her judge which is the better man. As for myself, Dolf, I can only say that I don't want her."

"Willie, do you remember the fable we read of in *Æsop*, about 'Vulpes et Uva'?" How the fox found that he could not reach the grapes, and went away, saying, 'But, even now, they are sour; neither would I touch them if found in the way?'

"Sour grapes for me! That will do for you, Dolf. Ha! what is that?"

"Voices in the outer cavern, as sure as I am a sinner. Look out!"

Two bodies, joined in deadly conflict, came rolling down the slide. In the dim light they could only make out that one was Rube, and the other an Indian in the dress of a Crow brave. Their strong arms were about each other, and each muscular right hand closed like a vice upon the wrist of the other. A grim determination settled upon cheek and brow.

Deadly strife is awful, when loud words mingle with steady blows; but more fearful still is the strife where teeth are hard set, and those lips are silent, and nothing heard but the panting breath and the heavy blows.

So the two forest men fought. Their toughened muscles stood out like ropes, their faces worked fiercely, and the breath of each grew shorter. As the two white men stepped forward to aid their friend for the first time, he spoke:

"Keep back!"

There was concentrated earnestness in the tone of his voice. They understood it. His rough code of honor would not allow more to come against one not more than his match.

The old hunter's wire-like muscles were never tired, and, at length, he wrested his hand from the grasp of his adversary. Two passes, quick as light, and he shook off his bleeding foe and rose to his feet. The Indian lay silent, with the blood oozing from two ghastly wounds.

"He hes his gruel," said Rube.

"Where did you find him?" asked Willie.

"Just outside. We had a few words by way of compliment, an' then we clinched. 'Tain't no use talkin', but he were the toughest customer I ever kin' acrost, 'thout an exception. Skeered him some, thet rollin' down the slide."

"Have you looked at the horses?"

"Yes."

"Come and see what we have found."

Dolf led the way to the opening, and pointed out with pride the strict surveillance they could exercise over the village. The hunter expressed his approbation of the discovery, and they came down. As they reached the level, the dying Indian rose upon his elbow and looked at them with strangely lurid eyes.

"Ah, the accursed word is true, and the Indian must cease from off the land. Long ago our medicine-men told us that we must some time yield to the arm of a race who had wings like birds and flew over vast seas—a nation with the power of the buffalo and the swiftness of the eagle.

"The medicine-men were very right. We die, and our lands fall to the lot of the accursed people. Woe, woe to the Crow, the Blackfeet, and the Nêz Percé, that a white man living on foot on their soil. They kept not the words of the medicine-men, who told them to slay the whites where they could be found. Alas for it!

"The Indian had many lands, and horses like the birds of the plains; but they said, 'Let these sit down among us, and take a little of our land, and a few horses, and so we shall be friends. They may teach us much.'

"What did they teach us? They taught us how to lie, and steal, and drink the fire-water; they taught us all this that was wrong, and nothing that is good. The hand of the Crow should be against them through all time to come.

"White man, I curse you dying. I go to the happy hunting-grounds of my people. I curse you with my latest breath. I hate you, I hate you!"

He paused, for the blood was welling up into his throat, and choked his utterance. The paroxysm over, he sunk back, and began, in a low, monotonous monotone, to chant the death-song of his people:

Great Manitou, I die!
Hear thou the voice of thy child;
Behold, how I bleed,
How I chill, as my spirit is passing on.
I die. The knife touched my heart,
And I shall not behold the morning.
Great Spirit, hear my curse:
Curse, ye darkest spirits,
The spoiler of the land of thy children;
Let thy lightning blast,
Let thy fires come down,
Let him tremble when he hears thy voice.
Behold I am a warrior,
I have taken many scalps;
I do not fear to die;

Let me hunt the buffalo,
The deer and the moose,
On the banks of the Happy River
Why should I live,
When the inheritance of my fathers,
The land they loved,
Passeth into the hands of the stranger?
Good father, let me go."

The voice was still, the muscular limbs stiffened after one more spasm, and the voice was forever stilled. He hunted the deer by the Happy River.

"Poor fellow," said Dolf.

"He's an Injin," said Rube, dogmatically, "an' you see I were born to rub him out. It's jest as well as it is. An' now, while we think of it, what kind of an Injin would I make?"

Dolf laughed. "Not a very good one, I fancy."

"I don't know thet. On the contrary, I think ov tryin' it. This yer Injin's kit, an' it's a good one, will make me look fancy. Jest hand me thet little pouch about his neck, will you?"

He complied, and Rube fished out from its depths various colored pigments, with which the Indian had adorned himself in life. Seeing these, he moralized:

"See thet, don't yer? Now thet Injin thort himself a beauty, and used ter paint red, yaller and white stripes acrost his face. Now thet is jest Injin natur'. He didn't know any better. Let's see what kind of a painter you are, Willie."

"What do you want me to paint?"

"Thet Injin's pictur'."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Mean jest what I say. I want you to paint thet Injin's pictur'."

"I have no canvas," laughed Willie.

"Here is yer canvas," said Rube, standing up before him. "Now go in."

"You want me to paint your face like that Indian's?"

"Yes."

"For what, pray?"

"You are derved inquisitive, I must say. Well then, it ar' thet I may go inter the village, and see how things is goin'."

Willie understood him now, and went to work with a will. A natural artist, he knew just what pigments to use to gain the desired tints, and in the course of half an hour, the hunter, having taken the body to the summit of the platform, put on the clothes of the slain man, and came down with the cat-like tread characteristic of the Indian. The two could not repress an exclamation of astonishment, so perfect was the likeness.

"Will I do?" he asked.

"I guess you will. What have you done with the body?"

The hunter pointed up at the opening.

"Let it on the platform?"

"No, threw it out the hole."

Dolf shuddered.

"You ain't used to it," said Rube, compassionately, "and 'tain't nat'ral you should. It's a poor life, any way, you'll find, for them as hes lived all their lives in cities. You'll git over bein' afraid of blood if you stay long upon the prairies."

"I hope not," said Dolf. "Will you go out soon?"

"Soon's it gits dark. We hev' got to be

keerful. I think Meton is in the hills. Somethin's the matter with him, as I c'u'd tell from that council this mornin'. Looked to me as ef they turned him away. Ef they hev', my word for it, they'll git enough of it. He hes half the warriors on his side, I know, fur he's a great brave, an' thet's what they like. He will wait out here tel his cronies comes together—then look out fur ha'r raisin', fur he will go inter the village and fight fur Ida, and Charlie, who he thinks ar' his prisoners. Let's lie down an' rest tel the time comes fer us to be goin', an' then we will try what we kin do for them. To-night, we ought to save them, ef possible."

CHAPTER IX.

Rube at Work.

METON did not leave the hills. Indeed, the hunter was quite right when he said that he would doubtless attempt to gather his friends, and by force of arms gain back what he had lost. The wily chief was in a rage, chiefly, because he had lost caste with the elders of the village. The scenes at the council rankled in his heart. That another should be preferred before him, and that other a prisoner of his own, filled him with anger.

His men came back at the appointed time. They brought yet others with them, and the wild band sat down in the shadow of the mountain, and talked of their prospects.

They could not surprise the Hawk. That they had already found, for when they came away he had been making ready his arms, and preparing to resist to the death, any attempt of Meton. What the outcast gained must be by hard fighting.

He rose and addressed his dusky adherents, and inflamed their minds by painting the death-scenes on the plains. They were soon ready for any evil.

"Let my brother Un-am go to the cave," he said. "In it he will find a bow and arrows. Let him bring them back to me."

A stout young Indian arose and went away, and the plotters sat silent, waiting his return. For an hour they smoked in silence, but he did not come back. They watched in vain for that Indian, for he was the one who now lay bleeding in the rocky cleft, into which he had been hurled by the strong arm of Rube. At the end of an hour, the second Indian was sent, and returned, bringing the bow, but finding no trace of the other. Meton took the bow.

"Let my brothers look at these arrows, and they will see that the quiver is of rattlesnake skin. In my other hand I hold a pipe. You, my friend, will take them in your hand as I take them. Go into the village, and call aloud for the Hawk. When he comes, say to him from me, that Meton is angry because he sits in his lodge, and rests upon the skins prepared for him. Say to him that Meton does not seek blood, but rather looks for peace at the hands of his countrymen. Let him go out of the chief's lodge, and sit down in his own; let the chiefs say to Meton, come back, and take

the place that is yours by right. Let them do this, and all will be well. But if he will not take the pipe, give him the skin of arrows, and come back to me."

The young Crow took them from the hand of the chief, and ran down the mountain side at the long lope peculiar to the Indian. They saw him cross the plain and disappear among the lodges.

Passing on to the central square to the opening before the council lodge, he began to call in a loud voice. A gray-haired chief asked him what he would have.

"Let the Hawk come forth and face me."

"What would my young brother do with the head chief? He has much work to do."

"Let him come forth," demanded the other.

The chief turned to a boy, and sent him to the Hawk. He came soon, crowned with the eagle-feathers of the chief, and demanded the business of the ambassador.

"I come from Meton, who has been driven forth from his lodge. I bring you his word. See what I hold in my right hand. It is a pipe. Its stem was cut, and its bowl carved by the medicine-men, many years ago. If you will take this, after I have told you the message of Meton, all will be well; but if, refusing to do this, you claim the other, it is here for you."

"Who is this Meton?" demanded the Hawk, angrily. "I do not know the man."

"Have you forgotten? Then I will tell you. He is one who was head chief of the village, whose place you have taken."

"I remember that there was such a chief, but the council have said, let his name be forgotten, for he is a chief of the tribe no more."

"Have you nothing more to say?"

"Nothing."

"Will you not smoke the pipe?"

"No."

The ambassador took the rattlesnake skin from his blanket, and held it out to the chief. He took it, and broke the arrows one by one, saying:

"As I break these arrows, so I will break the power of the exiled wretch you have named, if he comes to make good his threats. Say to him that the Hawk fears him not. Say to him that my young men are eager for battle, and they will sweep him from the earth, if he rouses them to anger. Let my young brother take good advice. He has been led away by this bad one. Let him come back to the tribe while there is yet time."

The other made a haughty gesture, as if to reject the overture.

"My brother is wrong," continued the chief. "Let him go to those who are on the mountain, that if they will come to the village to-day, all shall be well with them. But if they refuse, they suffer for it."

The young man turned away and returned to the hills. The Hawk looked after him silently, and then went to the door of Ida's lodge and called her. She came out, and he told her what had passed, and that they might expect an attack from Meton that night. She advised him to prepare for it, and put guards about the camp on every side.

He called his men together, and num-

bered them. He found that more than half the fighting element of the village were away. His strength had been in the influence of the old chiefs more than in the young and hot-blooded portion of the community. Those who remained were the bravest and best of the tribe, and he had no fear of the result. He found that he had seventy men on whom he could rely, and that somewhat more than that number were opposed to him. He did not wonder that the exile had grown bold, and defied him.

Night came, and found them ready. Huge fires had been lighted, not close to the village, but some rods away, so that, though the village lay in darkness, a broad band of light encircled it on every side, over which every one must pass who came from either way. It was rather sharp practice, and as good as a stockade in the way of those coming from outside.

Charlie was in his prison-lodge, not bound, but guarded. The lodge itself was in the very center of the village, and, for that reason, in the deepest gloom. Ida had left him not an hour before, and he sat with his head bowed upon his knees, treasuring every loving word, and look, and touch, in his heart. He had heard the preparation for the coming battle, and longed to be in it. Indeed, he sent for the Hawk, and begged that he might join in the fight, promising to return to his prison when it was over. He did not care to fall into the hands of Meton.

The Hawk had promised that, in case the battle went hard with them, he should be released, and arms were put into his hands. He thanked him, and the chief departed.

Something touched him; he turned quickly. In the dim light he could see that a part of the bark was being forced aside, and a dusky face looked in. Then it closed again, and he was alone.

Rube was in the camp. He had crawled in at that uncertain time, between darkness and light, when we see things in a sort of hazy indistinctness. The Indians were collected in groups, in the open spaces between the lodges, and he could make out that they expected an attack, from whom he could not tell.

He saw a lodge that looked desolate, and, lifting the curtain, he looked in. It was empty of human beings, and creeping in, he found a pile of buffalo-ropes in one corner. Lying down close to the wall of the wigwam, he drew these over him, and lay quietly. He was not one to be caught without a chance of escape, so he cut out the bark in a square, close to his head, so that he could easily push it out, and waited. In addition to this, he cut a small hole, from which he could look out upon the camp.

Everybody was arming, and he knew that a battle was coming, but with whom he could only surmise. Soon two Indians came into the lodge and took off some of the robes, spread them on the ground, and lay down with their heads resting on the pile. Had it been light in the tent, it would have been an impossible thing for Rube to escape.

Such control had this remarkable man over his nerves, that he lay quietly, with the

heads of the two resting within a foot of his own, and not a tremor betrayed to them his situation. Indeed, while they were pulling off the robes, he rolled a little closer to the wall, so as to remove his body from too close contact with the hides.

"Where is the white prisoner?" asked one.

"Next lodge," replied the other.

"Well done," thought Rube. "That is a good beginning."

"What did he do to Meton? eh?"

"Try to take away the prophethood."

"Couldn't come to council, but hunting. What has been done?"

The other, in his concise way, gave an account of the proceedings at the council, and things which had transpired since then. From their talk, he came to a correct understanding of the state of things in the village.

The old hunter determined to see Charlie. He judged rightly that the Indians would be busy in preparing for the fight, and he was in no fear of being taken. His disguise was perfect; none could have told him from an Indian.

The two talked on for half an hour, giving the spy a detailed account of the events of the day. Then a horn sounded, and they rose hurriedly, flung back the robes, and ran out of the lodge. Crawling on his hands and knees, Rube followed them to the door of the lodge, and looked out. Just then one of them remembered something forgotten in his haste, and turned quickly back for it. Rube had just time to draw back his head, when he came in. He found what he sought, his hatchet, and rushed out, brushing against Rube as he passed. That worthy individual followed him again, and could see the Indians hurrying from all sides toward the center. Here the head chief stood. Around him were grouped the chief men of the tribe, the gray-haired patriarch, who had called the young warriors in order to give them good counsel before the battle.

Now was his time. Creeping out, while all eyes were directed upon the chief, he got between the two lodges, and went to work with his knife.

He had just finished his task, and was about to speak to Charles, when a hand was placed upon his arm, and a voice whispered his name, or rather the name of the person he represented.

Rube knew enough of the dialect of the Crow to be able to converse properly, though he was somewhat concise in his language.

"Meton thought you were dead," said the Indian, who was no other than the young brave whom Meton had sent on the embassy, and who now returned in the character of a spy. The quick-witted hunter saw this at once, and understood why the chief had thought him dead. So he merely grunted.

"Who stay in this lodge?"

Rube told him the truth.

"Come 'way from lodge," said the other. "Tell you what Meton send me for."

Crawling away from the lodge a short distance, still lying prostrate, he told Rube that the chief had sent him to find out which lodge contained Ida and Charlie, and, if possible, he was to seize Ida, and bring

her away. Rube at once fell in with this plan, and together they crawled back to the lodge. The young spy knew the lodge in which Ida had stayed before, and toward this they now made their way. She, worn by the fatigue of the day, was sleeping quietly, under the light of a burning taper. Even the rough Indian held his breath, at the perfect loveliness of the face, sleeping.

"I will go in," whispered Rube. "You watch."

The other complied, and with a cat-like stealthiness Rube glided into the lodge. She lay upon the pile of buffalo-ropes, in the regal dress she had worn that day, and her hair covering her like a mantle. He had no time to hesitate. But stooping down, he covered her mouth and nostrils with his broad palm. She struggled fiercely, and the other, looking in, saw that she would free her mouth if she was not held tighter. Just as he was coming in, Rube stooped, and whispered in her ear.

She became quiet at once, and suffered a gag to be put into her mouth. He offered her this indignity in order to keep up appearances, but as soon as they were out of the lodge, carrying her between them, he removed it with one hand, while he supported her head with the other.

As they neared the broad band of light, the Indian whispered to Rube, and they darted across like a flash of light, fortunately unseen by the guards. But as they crossed the lighted space, the eyes of the spy dwelt more carefully upon the face of Rube, and he knew that he was not his friend.

"Ha!" he whispered. "You not Ish-me-no! You not the son of Ac-ta-wan!"

Both loosed their hold at the same moment. But before they closed, Rube said:

"If we fight here, they will hear us, and we shall both be taken. Let us go further on, and then let the best man win."

They went on, Ida following closely. After a little they came to the entrance to one of the clefts in the hills, and passed in.

"Here," said the Indian.

Both grasped their knives, and prepared for the fight. "Get out of way, little 'un," said Rube. "Climb up on one of these rocks an' see fair."

She complied. Just as they were closing with cautious steps, the light of the moon broke slowly through the last cloud that covered it, and then stood out in an unclouded sky. Both instinctively took a look at her calm face.

"The last time, mayhap," said Rube. "Good-by, little 'un, ef I go under."

"Good-by," she answered, in a broken voice.

A clash of steel was simultaneous with the sound of her voice, and in breathless anxiety she watched the combat. They were fairly matched, and both in splendid condition, and determined to win. The Indian had the advantage of years on his side, but he contended with a man who had never known defeat. Agile as a cat, he was never to be taken unawares. He dodged the blows intended for his heart, or turned them aside with his knife, and then put his own well in. The Indian was bleeding to death from two wounds, and he saw that

his only hope was in closing. He rushed in, and struck, and both knives flew from the combatants' hands, and they wrestled without weapons.

It was, as the old hunter says, "very plucky, but foolish." The Indian was a child in the hands of the other. In an instant he was borne back upon the sod, with two brown hands at his throat. Remorselessly they closed about it. A gurgle, a moment's deathlike stillness, and Rube rose slowly to his feet.

"Come down, little 'un; it's all over."

"Is he dead?" she asked.

"Dead enough. He were a fool. He found me spyin' in the village, thort I were his friend, and I j'ined him in stealin' you away. Pretty well done, I reckon. You wait a minnit."

He raised his fingers to his lips, and uttered a sharp, prolonged whistle, which echoed through mountain and village with startling earnestness.

"What was that for?" she asked.

"You wait a moment."

An answer came back from the hill. The hunter took her in his arms, and hurried along the side of the mountain, uttering the whistle from time to time. All at once she cried out:

"Oh, sir, here are men, coming. Hear their feet."

"I hear them. It's only the boys. Here they are."

"What have you done, Rube?"

"Nothin' much, youngster. What does yer think of thet for a present?" He set Ida on her feet, and Dolf, in his boyish earnestness, took both her hands in his and welcomed her back. Willie made less show of his pleasure, but his earnest face told that he was happy.

"And Charlie?" said Willie.

"A pris'ner yit. I am goin' back. Do you two take the girl to the place you know of, an' then watch her tel I come back. Ye can't do no good by goin' with me. There's goin' ter be right smart of a fight in the village, and I allow thet I kin save the boy in the rumpus."

"Before you go," said Ida, taking the brave man's hands in hers, "let me thank you for what you have done for me. You are going out to danger, perhaps to death, for the sake of one almost a stranger to you. The prayers of a weak woman are all I have to give, but they are yours while I live."

He pressed her hand to his rough lip, and was gone.

He knew the way now, and was not long in getting into the village. Without breathing, almost, he crept up to the lodge where Charlie was confined, and looked in. It was not empty, for there were two chiefs with him. One held his rifle, and another was helping him to fasten his belt. He was speaking in a low tone.

"You are right in giving me weapons now. When was this done?"

"Don't know how long. Not an hour."

"Was she asleep?"

"Guess so. Would have screamed, t'ink, ef's not 'sleep."

"Yes, yes, they doubtless surprised ner

sleeping. How many do you think there were?"

"Two," said the old chief.

Charles was no more than human; and when the chiefs came to him, and told him that some one had taken Ida from her lodge, and that it was thought to be the work of Meton and his men, no wonder that another was added to the already full list of the out-cast's remorseless enemies. They told him that they needed his aid, and he eagerly promised to join them, for revenge upon Meton. How he hated him now! The vindictive hate which had followed him in the person of the hunter was nothing to the fires which burned in his breast. He vowed to save her from the hands of the chief, or, if she had died at his hands, to take vengeance on him suited to the offense. He followed his new friends from the lodge, clutching his rifle eagerly.

"There he goes, poor fellow," muttered Rube, "an' his heart is jist about broke. I wish I c'd get near enough to speak to him. He don't seem to think of us at all. But here goes to follow them."

The three had entered the lodge of Ida, and he crept up to the opening he had made in the wall. "You see how it is," said the oldest chief, in such execrably bad English that we can not bring our pen to write it, but must perforce give his meaning. "There were two of them, and they came in at the door. She sleeps here. They cover her mouth an' take her out, while we were busy. Very bad, dat; sorry we no see dem."

"They shall pay for it," cried the young white man.

At this moment there rose a sudden clamor behind Rube, and half a dozen dark forms darted at him in the gloom. He was discovered, and could do nothing but run for it, as he had no particular wish to "rub out" any of the faction who supported Charlie, at this particular time. He darted into the shadow, dodged in and out among the wigwams, and at last threw his pursuers off the trail. It was very plain that his costume was well known in the village, from the quickness with which he had been pursued. He worked in and out among the lodges, until he came back to the spot where Charlie and the other chiefs were standing. Charlie was giving them his experience.

"I was more than half asleep, when something pricked me on the arm. I turned round, and saw that a hole had been cut in the bark, and an Indian looked in."

"How painted?" asked the old chief.

"Black and red bars across the breast white and red upon the face."

The chiefs exchanged glances.

"Ish-me-no!" said one.

"Ugh!" grunted the rest, in chorus.

"Who is Ish-me-no?" demanded Charlie.

"Friend of Meton; bes' friend he got."

"Ah! Then you think—?"

"He carry her 'way."

At this moment two or three braves rushed breathlessly up to them, shouting something in their tongue, which, though indistinct in their Babel of voices, led him to suppose that they were giving the information that Ish-me-no was in the camp. M

was getting too warm to be pleasant. If he did not get out of the village, he would certainly be taken, and yet he could hardly bring himself to leave.

A huge tree stood at his right hand. The hunter slung his rifle across his shoulder and began the ascent. A few seconds found him comfortably ensconced among the leaves, peering down upon the village.

It was nearly midnight, and the attack promised by the rattlesnake-skin must come soon—and it did. All at once, like a crash of thunder from a clear sky, broke a fearful yell from the plain around the village. Rifle-shots began to patter among the leaves, and the position of the hunter became precarious. True, they did not see him; but Indians are, proverbially, bad shots, and one of their careless bullets might knock him off his perch. Not liking the idea, he came down a little distance, and placed the body of the tree between himself and the shots.

The yells from both parties became deafening, and the missiles of all kinds fell thick and fast. Very little damage was done, however, and the Hawk, by the advice of Charlie, refused to go far from the village, while the night continued, and so give the attacking party an opportunity of getting him in ambush. They did something else, too, of which the savages themselves would never have dreamed, and which the attacking party found to their cost, when, incited by Meton, they made a desperate charge upon the village.

It is seldom that Indians make a determined attack of this kind; and when they do, it is generally successful. But, in this case, they found their way impeded by felled trees, with the sharpened branches pointing outward in inextricable confusion. They charged up to the abatis, and then a withering fire was poured upon them, while they floundered among the network of limbs.

Many fell; but they struggled bravely; and it was only when they saw that the task was hopeless, and the voice of Meton recalled them, that they retreated, fighting as they went.

Vain was the effort of Charlie to restrain the Hawk's warriors. They rushed over the obstructions, hatchets and knives in hand, and pursued the flying foe. Of course Meton turned upon them when he gained the woods, and they were pressed back in turn, losing nearly as many as their assailants had before them. The Hawk, who had remained at Charlie's side, rated them soundly when they returned, crest-fallen, from the unsuccessful charge.

Meton had seen Charlie fighting in the foremost rank. Twice he had his eye upon him, and made him the mark of his rifle, and as many times had some good genius turned aside the ball. His anger was still hot against him; and Charlie, who thought that Ida was a prisoner in his hands, hated him with a perfect hatred.

Once more the party of Meton, still as strong as the party of the Hawk, gathered for the attack. A busy crowd of skirmishers came threateningly on, and kept the defenders busy, while a new programme, nothing less than turning the flank of the

position, was being carried out. Charlie saw at once that his front was not pressed by the larger force, and detaching a score of the best men, he led them out to the left, toward which the fire was slowly tending. Here he ordered his men to lie down, and waited confidently the result.

It came at last. With a wild yell, forty of the bravest of the foe rushed down upon the spot where the men of Charlie lay. At a whisper, the rifles were lifted, and every one picked his man and poured in his fire. They came in a solid body, and every bullet did its office. Half the party seemed to sink into the earth; but, with a vengeful yell, the rest pushed on.

Charlie, placing his finger on his lips, blew a ringing peal. It was the signal agreed upon for more men; but there was no time to wait for them, so, drawing their knives, the enemies met hand to hand. Meton rushed upon Charlie.

"Dog of a white man," he shouted, "you die!"

"Hound!" cried Charlie, "I am your enemy."

Their knives clashed sharply together. Charlie had his own good blade, which he wore when he hunted the deer upon his native hills, and it seemed like a sword in his hand. In the dim light they fought, each one striving for the other's life. The combat raged around them, and, in a backward rush of his men, Charlie was separated from his enemy. The forty had proved too many for him, and his men were slowly giving back, smiting the foe at every step, when the reinforcement sent by the Hawk joined them, and they in turn attacked the enemy, who retreated, bearing Meton in their midst. The attack was a failure.

Meton was a determined and desperate man; he could not give up now, if he would. His backwoods education had taught him never to yield while there was the slightest possibility of success, and he did not yet despair. Besides, hate, revenge, every evil passion, spurred him on. He must conquer or die.

The night passed slowly. Desultory firing was kept up during the darkness; but, as morning came, the hunter saw there was no chance of doing any thing for Charlie, and he left his tree and stole noiselessly out of the camp.

He got out without trouble, and at once made his way to the mountain. He saw that the men in the village could attend to the case of Meton, and he wished to assure himself of the safety of his friends.

He entered the cave on the outside, and he could hear their voices. He called, and could hear the rattle of their arms as they sprung up, eager for the conflict, if it were necessary to fight for her. When they knew his voice, the rifles were dropped, and they called upon him to descend. He slid down the rock and stood before them. She sprung toward him, with only one word upon her lips.

"Charlie?"

"He is well, and no longer a prisoner."

"Where is he?"

"In the village."

"I thought you said—"

"That he was no longer a prisoner. Wal, I did. But he hes j'ined the Crows in the village in the'r job of whippin' Meton's Crows out of it; an' all I kin say is, he is doing it up like a first-rate warrior."

"What do you think they will do next?" she asked, after the hunter had given a detailed account of the battle, and its results.

"Wal, ef I look at it rightly, in the mornin', thet is, in 'bout two hours, at the furthest, those fellers in the village will pitch inter ther ones out ov it, an' whip them all to pieces. An' ther way I look at it, boys, we hed better be on hand, and help thet side."

"All of us?" asked Dolf.

"Wal, no, I don't want to leave Miss Ida alone, tho' she'd be as safe har' as a baby in its cradle."

"I don't want anybody to stay with me," she said, in a spirited tone. "I am not afraid."

Dolf was eager for the fight, and this decision on the part of Ida pleased him vastly. He laughed.

"I warrant Miss Ida could outride any of us now in a fair race upon the plains. I move we don't coop her up in this hole, but give her arms, and let her ride out to a place we shall appoint, stay there a certain time, and then, if we do not come, make the best of her way to the fort."

The hunter shook his head.

"No, no, boy. This place is safe enough, an' the best place. Ef you don't want to leave her alone, *you* stay with her."

Dolf looked doleful at the idea.

"There, there," laughed Ida. "I won't have any of you. Go along, every one, and leave me to take care of myself. You need not have the least fear but I shall do it well. What is that?"

The hunter had taken something from under his hunting-shirt.

"Your rifle," he said.

She seized it eagerly. "Where did you get it?"

"In your lodge."

"Thank you. And you have all the accouterments. How kind of you."

They passed an hour in the cave, and then the three went out together, leaving her alone. They passed down the slope of the hill, just as the gray dawn was breaking in the east, and the sun's first rays gilded the lofty peaks. They went to the spot where they had left their horses, and found them safe. Mounting, they rode round to the west, so as to come up well in the rear of Meton's band, who were still pressing the unlucky siege when the morning came. Such a morning as only in the West can be seen. A thousand mingled perfumes came from the surrounding prairies, and the graceful deer, in the distance, came down to the river bank to drink.

The hunter took off his hat, and let the fresh breeze play among his black, crisp locks.

"Sich times as these yer," he said, "mek' me wonder how men kin live—and I hears thet such men do live in the towns—as say ther' ain't no one as made all these things. 'Tain't likely, no, that these things shu'd grow themselves. They didn't do it, and what's more, they cu'dn't. Yer can't find

an Injin mean enough ter say as ther' ain't no God; all of them believe thet, any way. I ain't no book-man, but I doesn't believe thet we go to ther dogs when we die, no I don't, scarcely."

Such was the religion of the noble-minded, though uncouth man. Let no man dare to sneer at him. His religion savored of his training; the woods and the prairies were his home. He had hunted, fought, and suffered over them from end to end, and in every bending leaf or blade of grass, in every shrub, he read of a great—good Creator.

"What shall we do to help Charlie?" asked Dolf.

"Wait a bit; we kin tell better when we see how the fight goes on. Those fellows in the village are brave, and I take it, if they win the battle by his help, will set him free; but we will be on hand. Meton is a despr'it' man, an' a despr'it' man does qu'ar things sometimes; now mind, I tell ye, he'll fight while a drop of blood flows in his veins; fur he hates Charlie and the Hawk like p'ison, and loves the prophethess."

Dolf emitted a sharp whistle. "Phew! You don't say. Well, I am blessed. I'll cut his throat."

"No, ye won't. Thet is resarved fer me. I've sworn ter take his sculp, an' I won't have no one ter step in atween me an' my vingeance. It can't be done, no-how."

"Well, well, have it so, but we are getting pretty close to the village."

"What's that?"

"A close shave," replied Dolf, wiping the blood from the crease of a bullet upon his right ear. The rascal meant well, but a miss is as good as a mile."

"Fall back," whispered Rube. "I didn't think we hed been so clust ter them as thet."

"Hot work we shall have. The knaves are mad and vicious, and what's more, they know we are on hand. Thet may skeer them. Ah-h-h! There comes the attack from the town."

He was right. With the first gray of the morning, Charlie, knowing that he now had one-third more men than Meton, began to press him hard. His riflemen played upon their front. Skirmishers, armed with heavy bows, pushed up as closely as they dared to the thickets, and wherever a leg, head or arm made its appearance, it was pierced by the ready shaft. Then by a sudden rush, they gained the skirts of the woods, bearing back the party of Meton, resisting with all their power.

They were now on equal footing as regarded cover, and fought after the manner of Indians, from tree to tree. Let a head appear, an elbow protrude, and a bullet whistled by it, or buried itself in the member. Charlie saw that he was losing as many as the enemy in the struggle, and he passed the word to his men. At the word, forty lithe forms glided from cover, drawing a hasty and ineffectual volley from the enemy as they advanced, and then closed.

The conflict was terrible. Men who had lived in close companionship through life, stood foot to foot, and breast to breast, each striving for the other's life. Axes gleamed,

rifles were clubbed, and knives flashed; while over all rose the voice of Charlie Westgate, calling for Meton to come out and face him. The wily chief knew better than to meet him in this mood, and contented himself with more ignoble game.

The battle could have but one ending. The band of the Hawk now outnumbered that of the enemy two to one, and the rest fell under their rapid strokes. With a despairing yell, they broke, and fled through the forest, pursued by their late friends, now their unrelenting enemies. One by one they fell by the bullet, knife and hatchet, until only three clung to the side of Meton, and escaped into the hills.

"After him," shouted Charlie. "I would not have him escape for all the gold of California."

Five men joined in the pursuit, among whom was the Hawk. The defeated chieftain had disappeared among the rocks. Not a trace of him could they find. The Indians knew that the rocks were full of hiding-places, and they scattered here and there in the pursuit. An angry glow deepened upon the face of Charlie Westgate; his anger grew hotter still.

He went to and fro among the rocks, calling the name of the chief; no reply except the echoes in the desolate cliffs. Where could he have gone?

All at once a yell from his companions aroused him, and following their pointing fingers, he beheld a sight that curdled his blood with horror.

Just in front of them was a great chasm, which nature had rent in the mountain side, the same one into which Rube had cast the body of his slain foe. Across this gulf a great tree, uprooted by the storm, had fallen, and its branches rested upon the other verge. Hundreds of feet below, the rocks of the bottom of the chasm promised a fearful death to one who should fall from the perilous height. Along this tree, clinging to the branches with one hand, walked Meton, while his other arm supported Ida. She stretched out her arms to him, and called his name. He started forward.

"Go back!" cried Meton, hoarsely. "Another step and I drop her."

Charlie stopped, while his breath came in hurried gasps.

CHAPTER X.

Rubbed Out.

We left Ida reposing safely in the great cave. It was a strange situation, and to one brought up among the sickly sentimentalities of the world, it would have been terrible; but Ida, a royal child of nature, loved all her varied forms. To her, this great room, fashioned by the Creator's hand, was but another instance of his marvelous power.

All was silent in the cave, save when here and there water came trickling slowly downward and dropped with a patter upon the stone floor. The fawn, which had followed Dolf thus far, and had been brought down into the cave to help while away the time, came to her, and laying its pretty

head upon her knee, looked up into her face with its great, pleading eyes.

"Poor fellow," whispered Ida, patting the glossy head. "Do you want to show me that I am not alone?"

It seemed a relief to have something to talk to, even though it could not understand.

The noise of the battle aroused her, and she rose, and following the course marked out by Dolf, reached the opening through which came light and air. From this she had a good view of the battle-field, and witnessed the various charges and conflicts, until the final one. She could see him, too, in the thickest of the battle, and she knew that he yet was safe. But her heart gave a great thrill, and she shrunk aside in terror, as Meton and his three friends came bounding along the mountain side.

She knew they would be pursued, and looking out, she saw him coming. She came down from her perch, and had made her way into the broad apartment below, where a scuffling noise in the passage told her that they were coming. She started forward to meet them, but a shriek burst from her lips as she saw that it was Meton. She grasped her rifle and stood at bay. He folded his arms and sternly regarded her, while his men followed him into the cave. It was not unknown to him.

"You are very beautiful, white girl," he said, "and your beauty has been a snare to me. Long ago, I took you from your father, on the plains. You were mine; no other one had a right to look upon you. I brought you to our village and you became great. You wear the dress of the prophethess."

"What have I lost at your hands? Look at me. I have been a chief; I am a chief no more. I had many friends; these are all you have left me; where are they? Yonder they lie, dead, and you killed them."

She turned pale, but answered firmly:

"Meton is a liar. He says that I killed his men. I did not. Why did he not let me return to my people? I wanted to do so, but he forced me back and some of his men were slain. He murdered my guards and then he was no more chief."

"Be silent," commanded the chief. "You do yourself wrong, and me. Now listen, I am going to live with the Dacotahs, who will take me because they know I am brave. You shall go with me. I have said it. Take her."

He pointed with his hands, and his men rushed forward.

The rifle cracked, but it was a woman's hand that pulled the trigger, and only a slight flesh-wound was the result. She struggled vainly in the vice-like grasp of the two men who had seized her.

"No make fuss," cried one, "else me kill." Meton thrust him angrily aside.

"Come," said he, taking her by the arm. She sunk down at his feet, and refused to stir.

He drew his hatchet, and flourished it before her eyes. She only smiled, and he saw that she regarded death as preferable to captivity with him. The eyes of the wild man lit up with a sudden flame.

"Girl," he shouted, "come!"

"I will not," she answered, firmly. He

stooped, and lifted her in his arms, and for the first time she realized what a power there was in his grasp. He lifted her easily with one hand, and turned to go up the passage. At this moment the sound of voices was heard in the outer cave. It was the three friends, who had ridden hard, to get to the mountain before Meton; but he had taken the shorter path, and was here before them.

She tried to scream, but a dusky hand was over her mouth, and a voice hissed in her ear that a whisper would be her death. With the hope of escape came the fear of the grim monster, and she dared not call out.

But they would come down. Surely the Indians were caught in their own trap, and would have to fight for her at least. But to her surprise, Meton had a better knowledge of the mysteries of the cave than even the hunter himself. Turning to the left, a sudden turn about a jutting point of rock brought them into a long gallery, extending, apparently, into the bowels of the mountain. A gleam of ferocious joy lighted up the face of the Indian, as he turned about and helped roll a great stone before the opening, which was about three feet high, completely blocking it up.

"He never find it out," he said, decisively, taking her again in his arms and hurrying down the passage.

Scarcely had they left the place, when the three came down the slide, to find the place desolate, with the exception of the fawn, who came to Dolf and laid her head against his knee with a pitiful moan.

"What is it, old fellow?" said he. "Where is Ida?"

"She is gone," cried the hunter. "Carried away, too, fer ther' hes been a fight har', an' a rifle hes been fired. Smell the smoke. An' here is her piece," he added, picking up the rifle where it had been left in the struggle.

The fawn went away to the other end of the room, and came back with a pitiful face.

"What is that fer?" said Rube, looking interested. "Foller the little thing ef she goes away ag'in."

She did go again, and led them to the place where the great stone barred the way. The hunter looked at it keenly.

"Aha!" he said. "This yer hes been moved. Come, boys, give it a push, all together." A very little effort pushed the stone aside, and showed them the path they must travel.

"It's that villain Meton," said Rube, as he caught sight of the moccasin-tracks upon the dusty floor of the passage. "It's him, an' no other. Thet feller's time is about up, to my thinkin'. This yer hand is bound to rub him out. Stands ter reason it sh'ud. We can't hev' things our own way; no, not at all. Thet Injin were made ter be rubbed out by me. All right; I'll do it."

The path through which they went was dark and slippery, and inclined upward. They went cautiously forward, feeling their way by the wall, covered with a slime which had been the gathering of years.

"Dern it," muttered Rube, "what a pesky hole."

"Where do you think it leads to?"

"Can't tell. Don't know thet I keer, skurcelly. All I know is thet Meton hes gone through har', an' thet he hes Miss Ida with him. The little un' is good blood; hold down the torch. See! here she hed a squabble with the pesky knave, an' he tuk her up to carry her, blame him."

The passage grew wider, and a breath of cool air struck their faces. They knew that they were coming to the outer air, and their hearts beat faster. Each grasped his weapon and made ready for the fray.

They came upon the Indians upon a sort of natural platform, just above the chasm. The three who had followed the varied fortunes of Meton thus far, turned at bay, with their hatchets in their hands. They were stalwart fellows, and for some minutes a fearful combat raged upon the rocky shelf. The hunter closed with his opponent, and hurled him backward. He fell over the precipice, and was seen no more. Dolf shot one through the head with a pistol, while the second joined Meton in his flight.

Over rock and chasm, familiar to them from infancy, the doomed red-men made their way. Sometimes the companion of Meton looked furtively at the white face lying against Meton's breast, and longed to kill her; but he dared not speak his thoughts. In pity to her woman's heart her senses were gone, and she lay quiet against the brown breast. Twice the rifle of Rube covered him, and as many times it was lowered, as he feared he might hurt the unhappy prisoner. The Indian ran out upon the great tree, close to the edge of the cliff, and here the girl was suspended over the precipice, and that haughty defiance thrown in Charlie's teeth.

"As you hope for mercy," cried the horror-stricken young man, "show it."

"I hope for no mercy—I will not show it. Go back, young white man; the prophetess of the Crows shall cook my venison in the Dacotah lodges. She is not for you."

Charlie sprang forward, but recoiled as the fiend lifted her high in the air with both hands and made a motion to cast her into the abyss below. As he raised her, a pair of white hands reached downward and tore her from his grasp. With a cry of unutterable hate, the Indian looked up to see from whence came this new foe. It was plain at once.

A second ledge ran along a fathom above his head, narrow, it is true, but still wide enough to support the hunter, who, creeping on his hands and knees, reached a spot just over Meton's head at the moment he raised her above it. Regardless of danger, the hunter ran quickly back along the ledge and placed the fainting girl in the arms of her lover.

Joy seldom kills. She awoke to a consciousness of her situation, to know that she reclined against his strong breast, and that his heart was beating close to hers. Those who have suffered much and then received a heartful of joy, can understand the feelings of their hearts. They forgot who were near for a moment, and were only roused by a terrible calamity.

The Indian had remained standing on

the log in an uncertain, irresolute way, looking at the group. All his evil heart overflowed with hatred. How dared they be happy. His rifle was at his back, and taking it down he leveled it at the breast of Ida. Only the eyes of Rube were on him at the moment. With a cry, he flung himself before her, firing as he sprung. At the same moment the rifle of the Indian exploded; but, wounded unto death, he reeled blindly, catching at the limbs for support. Rube, pierced by the treacherous bullet, fell, gasping, at the foot of the woman he had saved.

"It's all over," he said. "Thet Injin, who is goin' down ter death in another minnit, hes done it. I hev' kept my vow, and I ain't sorry. I am a man as hes tried ter do his duty all his life. Mayhap I ain't been right always; I don't s'pose I have; but it don't matter if I tried ter do it."

He turned a look upon Meton. The chief had sunk down upon his knee, and held by a limb, while his glazing eyes were upon the party. It was plain that he had not long to live, for the blood was trickling down from the brown breast, and dropping with a patter upon the bark on which he knelt. The wild man saw his doom, and, fascinated by the dying eyes of the hunter, he looked him in the face.

"Twere years ago, Meton, when you done the deed which made me yer inimy. 'Twan't a good thing fer either of us. It hes been yer death, and mine too, fer we ain't neither of us long to live. Yer kin see what it is ter go ag'in' white men; yer can't do it—whites was bound to rule. I said I would kill ye, an' now I hev' done it, fer yer going."

The Indian was sinking slowly downward, and the other hand now rested on the log. He was evidently in fearful agony, but he would not show it, for Meton was no coward. He kept his eyes fixed upon the face of Rube, and as the last word was spoken, he rose suddenly, made a single step forward, and then, with a great flow of blood from his wounded breast, fell backward and was seen no more.

"He is gone," said Ida. "Oh! Rube, it breaks my heart to see you lying there, and all for me."

"I c'u'dn't be better," murmured he, feebly. "I don't ask nothin' better than ter die fer you. I promised at thet grave on the prairie thet I w'u'd die, if it were need-ed, fer ye. Yer see I hev' done it."

Ida knelt at his side, sobbing. Her grief distressed him, and he put out his hand with an appealing gesture.

"Don't," he said; "I don't like it. I'm glad, too, ter know thet I ain't got ter die like a dog, an' not one ter stand above my body and say, 'It is a pity he is gone.' Don't think I ain't grateful fer yer goodness—no man c'u'd be more; but it cuts me ter see yer cry fer me, when I ain't done nothin' ter speak of."

"You have given your life for me. Is that nothing?"

"Thet's not on the bill," asserted the dying man. "I promised thet ter yer mother, an' yer ain't got nothin' ter do with thet. An' now, miss, here is my last wish; and,

"It ain't too much, I ask it ov ye. I've always wanted it, and maybe ye'll do it fer me. I always thou't thet I laid yer mother down ter sleep in ther pleasantest place in all ther broad prairies. I want ter rest ther' too. I want ter be laid as near her as may be. Can it be done?"

The Hawk stepped forward.

"It can be done; I will see it done."

"Thank yer, Injin. Ah, Hawk, how ar' yer? Ye are one of ther few Injins I w'u'd ever trust. Now ye've promised, I feel safe."

"Most gone, Rube?" asked the Hawk, who had met him often at the posts.

"Yes, Injin, I'm about done. I'm an old stick, and it don't make so much odds. I'll tell ye whar' ter go, so that ye may find the spot safe, for these might forget it." He described the spot.

Willie, Dolf, and Charlie kneeled by his side, and the man's eyes turned upon them in a farewell glance.

"Well, boys," he said, "it's over—our tramping and fighting together. I hoped fer one thing. I looked ter see ye safe back ter the settlements. 'Twould hev' been hard ter part, fer I'd got ter likin' ye, an' p'raps it's better as it is. Willie?"

"Yes, Rube."

"Ye are from the north of New York, ain't ye?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'll tell ye what it is. Ye won't laugh at me any of ye, but here is summat I want ye to do. Ye know whar' Ontario is?"

"Yes."

"Wal, there's a little village there called Dayton. Yer know it?"

"I go there often, Rube."

"Wal, you take this." He drew out from his bosom a crumpled sampler of ancient date, the work of some deft maiden's hand in the olden time. "How long would ye think I've carried thet? A matter of twenty-five years, or thereabouts. Wal, if she lives, her name is Susan Blair, and the place is so small everybody will know her. Ef she is alive, tell her how I died with yer, doin' my duty. I left her when I were twenty, and she were a rosy little girl of eighteen years. Well, we had lots of promises to make, but I never went back, 'cause I got to love the plains, and, 'sides, some one told me that she had forgotten me. I found out, after thet, thet it was a lie, but I c'u'dn't go back then, so I never looked upon her face again. You take it to her, ef she's alive, and ef she's dead, jest lay it on her grave, and kiver it with a little dirt so it won't be lugged away. Ef they tell us true about the angels, then she will know it, and be glad."

So the rough hunter had a love-page in the history of his life! Ah, it is a dreary heart, indeed, which never loved. One of the sweetest poems poet ever sung says:

"Better to have loved and lost,
Than never to have loved at all."

The world would be a sad place without love.

The hunter was sinking fast. He looked from face to face in a hasty, undecided way, and then beckoned Ida nearer. Honest,

true heart, bashful as a girl, he feared to ask her aloud.

"Would you mind kissin' me ag'in?" he said. "I'm an old man, and dyin', you know."

Ida sat down by his side, and took the poor head upon her knees, kissing him as he would have been kissed, and parting his hair as tenderly as a mother might have done—the mother who, in that old brown frame house by the side of the distant Lake Ontario, had long since laid down to rest—the mother who, through the long years in which she never heard from her boy, never ceased to pray that the God who had been her counsel and stay, would never forsake him, no matter how far he strayed.

His breath grew shorter and shorter still, and a film gathered over his eyes.

"Sing!" he said, as the memory of the old-time songs of childhood came slowly back to him. "Sing."

And Ida, in a voice broken by her sobs, sung of the Redeemer, and his power to save. The hunter rose upon his elbow.

"I believe it," he said. "Hev' ye got a Bible, where it tells how the Lord kem' to save jest sich as I am?"

Dolf took a testament from his breast-pocket.

"Let the little 'un' read," said he.

And she read the glorious promise of the Redeemer, and how, when upon the earth, he did not despise the weak and the lowly, and that his followers were unearned and ignorant men.

"That is the religion fer me," cried Rube. "I ain't afraid ter die. Jest giv' me thet little prayer ag'in. Thet was a prayer. 'Lord be merciful to me, a sinner.' Good-by, little 'un'. Good-by, boys. Never forget me."

A gasp, a bounding upward, and the life of the brave man was ended. She laid him reverently back upon the sod.

There was a strange procession filing out of the Crow village next day. Every warrior and old chief went with it. In the middle of the line walked the mustang of Rube, bearing the dead body of his master. Ida and the young adventurers rode in front.

For two days they traveled, and then they came to the grave on the prairie. There they made a grave, close to that of those whose death he had so well avenged, and, as he had wished, laid him to rest. Willie read a service over his grave, and then they turned away, to bid farewell to their Indian friends. Ida rode out in front and spoke to them feelingly for some moments, thanking them for their kindness to her, disclaiming any good done by herself, and bidding them a hearty good-by. There were speeches made by the old men, and then a general shaking of hands; after which a guide was given them, and a guard of two men, and they were away. Once only did Ida look back, and she could see the white stone shining out upon the prairie, at the head of her mother's grave.

They reached Laramie in good time, and here a surprise awaited them, for the first person they met was Jake, in the best of spirits. He had escaped from his captors, and been picked up by a party of hunters returning to the fort. He was overjoyed at

seeing them, whom he had never expected to see again on earth.

The party set out in high spirits to the States, joining a large train which started that day. The overland route was safely passed, and they reached Leavenworth at last. Their happiness would have been complete but for the cloud the death of Rube had cast upon them, and through life, they retained an endearing recollection of that brave trapper who had done so much for them.

Pass three years, and go with me to the banks of Ontario, not far from the city of O—. Here, upon a pretty slope, looking out upon the lake, stands a brown-stone cottage, embowered by vine and leaf. Shaded walks and arbors adorn the grounds, and every thing shows a cultivated taste.

This is the home to which Charlie Westgate brought his bride, for the prophetess did not remain in St. Louis and work, as she had said she would do, and here they had lived happily for more than two years.

A carriage rolls up to the gate, and two young men descend. Surely we know the first—yes, it is Dolf, grown brown and hardy in these three years, and with him, Willie.

The young couple come out to meet them, and we see that the face of Ida has that look which we see only upon faces which are the index of a happy heart. She carries upon her arm a boy of a year, smiling up into her face.

"What did you say you called him?" asked Willie, taking the little fellow in his arms.

"Don't you know?" said Ida. "Reuben."

"After him?" questioned Willie.

"Yes. For, under God, we owe every thing to him. But, Dolf, come here. Why, you are getting brown as a Hindoo. I hear that you have come to a sensible conclusion. Going to get married, are you?"

"Umph, yes. Nell Fields marries me next week, to get rid of me. Queer way of doing that, I fancy. I couldn't do any better since Charlie took you."

"And you, Willie?"

"I! Oh, I am a bachelor, dyed in the wool. I—"

"I don't like to doubt the word of a gentleman, but he tells my sister, Mollie, a different story, since they are to be married in the holidays. Own up, Willie."

"I won't. Give me that boy back again, Ida."

"For you to hold him up by the neck in that manner?" cried the young mother, indignantly. "No, thank you."

"Reuben is his name, is it? You could do no less. Do you know that I found that Susan Blair, whom the poor fellow loved, and gave her the sampler, telling how he died. She was a middle-aged woman, married and happy, but when I left the room, I looked back to see her sobbing over the faded relic as if her heart would break."

And thus the hunter was remembered

THE END.

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| 2 CAPTAIN CUFF and 57 other Songs. |
| 3 THE GAINSBORO' HAT and 63 other Songs. |
| 4 JOHNNY MORGAN and 60 other Songs. |
| 5 I'LL STRIKE YOU WITH A FEATHER and 63 other Songs. |
| 6 GEORGE THE CHARMER and 56 other Songs. |
| 7 THE BELLE OF ROCKAWAY and 52 other Songs. |
| 8 YOUNG FELLAH, YOU'RE TOO FRESH and 60 other Songs. |
| 9 SHY YOUNG GIRL and 65 other Songs. |
| 10 I'M THE GOVERNOR'S ONLY SON and 58 other Songs. |
| 11 MY FAN and 65 other Songs. |
| 12 COMIN' THRO' THE RYE and 55 other Songs. |
| 13 THE ROLICKING IRISHMAN and 59 other Songs. |
| 14 OLD DOG TRAY and 62 other Songs. |
| 15 WHOA, CHARLIE and 59 other Songs. |
| 16 IN THIS WHEAT BY AND BY and 62 other Songs. |
| 17 NANCY LEE and 58 other Songs. |
| 18 I'M THE BOY THAT'S BOUND TO BLAZE and 57 other Songs. |
| 19 THE TWO ORPHANS and 59 other Songs. |
| 20 WHAT ARE THE 'WILD WAVES SAYING, LATER? and 59 other Songs. |
| 21 INDIGNANT POLLY WOG and 59 other Songs. |
| 22 THE OLD ARM-CHAIR and 58 other Songs. |
| 23 ON CONNY ISLAND BEACH and 58 other Songs. |
| 24 OLD SMOKE, THE HOT-CORN MAN and 60 others. |
| 25 I'M IN LOVE and 56 other Songs. |



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| 26 PARADE OF THE GUARDS and 56 other Songs. |
| 27 YO, HEAVE, HO! and 60 other Songs. |
| 28 'Twill NEVER DO TO GIB IT UP SO and 60 other Songs. |
| 29 BLUE BONNETS OVER THE BORDER and 54 other Songs. |
| 30 THE MERRY LAUGHING MAN and 56 other Songs. |
| 31 SWEET FORGET-ME-NOT and 53 other Songs. |
| 32 LITTLE BABY MINE and 53 other Songs. |
| 33 DE BANJO AM DE INSTRUMENT FOR ME and 53 other Songs. |
| 34 TAFFY and 50 other Songs. |
| 35 JUST TO PLEASE THE BOYS and 52 other Songs. |
| 36 SKATING ON ONE IN THE GUTTER and 53 other Songs. |
| 37 KOLORED KRANKS and 59 other Songs. |
| 38 NIL DESPERANDUM and 53 other Songs. |
| 39 THE GIRL I LEFT BEHIND ME and 50 other Songs. |
| 40 'TIS BUT A LITTLE FADED FLOWER and 50 other Songs. |
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